



NERMAN

NEILSON

BY

ELISSA LANDI

To my beloved sister
Mollie

from

Elissa

with sincerity and devotion -

January 31st 1926 .

The characters in this novel are entirely fictitious

NEILSON

BY

ELISSA LANDI

LONDON
EVELEIGH NASH & GRAYSON
LIMITED

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NEILSON

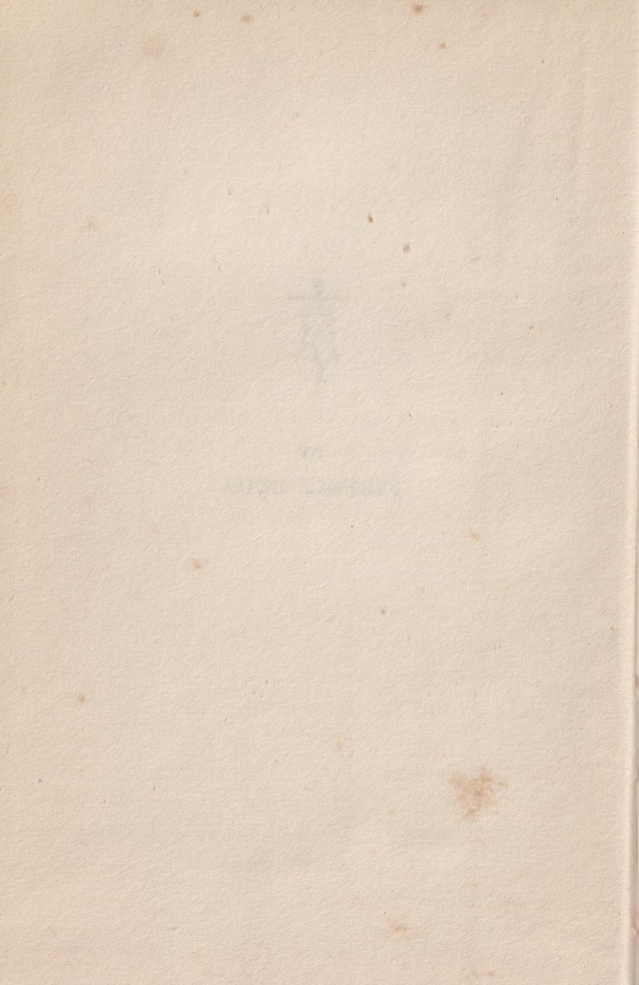
ELSA LANDI

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TO
FERENCZ BUDA



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NEILSON

CHAPTER I

GEORGE NEILSON

IMAGINE a frosty day about a fortnight before Christmas, and a well-known London toy-shop of which the lighted windows display a marvellous collection, enough to make the heart of any normal child leap.

Imagine that select shopping quarter, London's Brompton Road, Knightsbridge, some time around five o'clock in the afternoon.

Imagine next, a pitiable, forlorn, little figure standing before this toy-shop and sighing deeply. It is not sighing because there is insufficient money with which to buy itself a lovely doll with an inane, grinning face, nor because a poor little sister at home waits for such a doll, nor because it has been forbidden it. For the pitiable little figure is dressed in a light grey coat with a deep astrakhan collar and Russian cap and muff to match. Shining, black Russian boots adorn its feet; it could not sigh for cold. No, the pitiable little figure sighs because it has lived seventeen years instead of seven.

Behind the pitiable little figure, among the crowd, stands a noticeably tall man who watches with interest. For the last three days has it stood there

just at five o'clock and sighed. The stranger sighs also: he is twenty-seven instead of seventeen.

Of course the pitiable little figure is beautiful. Ugly women who suffer are not interesting because they are not rare; but handsome women who suffer are curiosities. Therefore is the tale of Christyn, the pitiable little figure, told in these pages.

The stranger is our handsome George Neilson, poet and philanderer, once an incarnation of Chelsea, now the darling of St. John's Wood; the aim of every bad young woman; the vain and secret ambition of every respectable young lady; writer of verses which make the sensitive tremble with emotion; the centre of every amusement; ever penniless; never a beggar.

Because her eyes were smarting, Christyn moved closer to the window, so close that her fine, too small nose almost flattened against it. For this reason also, she stared so ostentatiously at the doll with the grinning face. Oh, if only she could return home, go to an old toy cupboard, pick out an old doll and play again! But that she could not do, for her perfectly worthy, irreproachable stepfather, Juan Martinez, had long ago given her toys away to poor children who would appreciate them. And his beautiful daughter had long since seen to it that Christyn should learn to play with other things than dolls.

But to-day she longed to be able to have a doll and to love it again.

No, it was absolutely no use staring so hard; the liquid in her eye escaped and rolled slowly along her cheek and to the tip of her nose, where, after an eternity, it dropped off; but it left a wet streak on her face. She dared not wipe it off for fear of attracting attention.

She had stood before the shop too long, already. She must go home to the careless stepfather and his sarcastic daughter, to listen to the one's humourless witticisms and the other's prattle.

George Neilson watched, then cleared his throat and spoke.

"Don't lean your nose on the glass," he said, "it isn't hygienic. Besides, we all go through it, if that helps at all?"

"It doesn't help," she replied thoughtlessly, "why should it?"

"Oh, it's so much worse to go through this sort of misery alone. Everyone grows up, you know."

"Yes, for nearly three years one says to oneself, 'I am nearly grown up,' but one morning one wakes up and says to oneself, 'I *am* grown up and nothing will ever make me a child again!'" And Christyn turned and walked swiftly away.

The enormity of what she had done appalled her; she had spoken to a strange man in the street, a thing she had been warned against for many years. The knowledge of her sin made her heart beat. Oh, it was dreadful!

George Neilson watched the slim little figure as it hurried down the street, and he sighed. Then, the object of his interest having departed, he turned on his heel and walked thoughtfully over to the nearest omnibus-landing.

Once installed on the top of the omnibus, he gave way to his fit of depression. She reminded him, she reminded him. Nice kind of melancholy memories that one could suck at like stalks of sweet grass, so that every time one tasted sweet grass it conjured up the past. Sweet grass, that girl's face. Sweet and

hurtful. *Nostalgie* it was called and was not to be translated.

George Neilson was an artist and had lived among artists since his seventeenth year; he had lived among creatures who give way to their most superficial emotions without a second's hesitation. In his world one caught eagerly at the most recent sensation, for an artist must know everything from the foam to the dregs. He was fully aware of the fact that he was deliberately pricking himself into the realization that the past was irretrievably gone, and that it was the Toyshop-Girl who had brought it back to him. Why should he not re-live pleasant things, even if they made him sad? That particular type of sadness was pleasant in itself. It was sad, too, that such a little lady was so far removed from him: he knew she felt ashamed of having spoken to him. How strange that conventions existed!

"I'm a kippered herring, am I? Well, I'd like to be a lily."

The first day upon which he had chanced to pass the toy-shop he had halted before it, because he still felt strongly drawn towards such things as little trains and monkeys that climb poles with the aid of string. Then someone close to him had sighed and he had looked at that someone and had been struck by her resemblance to . . .

But that is another story.

When George Neilson was sixteen, he fell in love for the first time, the lady in question being eight years his senior and an aunt, by marriage, of his best friend. In those days he was not Neilson, poet and philanderer, but only George, seventh of the ten children of the impecunious Hon. Thomas Neilson of Hilford, horribly precocious, but with an inclination

for writing verses and already the bad habit of doing conventional things unconventionally: it is quite conventional to fall in love with a lady of twenty-four at sixteen, but bad taste when she is Lady Barthone and married to an old peer whose age is somewhere around fifty and who bears the fitting soubriquet of "Old Growly"; when Lady Barthone is very frivolous indeed and George too courageous.

George at sixteen and radiant Eleanor at twenty-four; the young mother with her golden-haired child, and the boy who is going to be a fine, great poet. George, so full of the Melancholy of Beauty, of the tragedy of Eleanor's marriage to the spirit-breaking Old Growly, so eager to defend her against his own friend, Growly's nephew, Solterre, who mistrusts her and has contempt for her. Eleanor, full of the boredom of being Growly's wife, beginning to regret the fact that she had to sell herself to an old man because over in Ireland her father had got through both his own money and her mother's; realizing that the golden-haired child she has borne is a girl, that there will be no more golden-haired children now, and that Growly resents this. It is nice to be worshipped by a precocious child like Solterre's overgrown school-friend, George; in fact, it is perfectly sweet, and no harm in it either. On a moonlit evening George wraps a pebble in one of his poems and throws it into her bedroom window. This is in the summertime at Barthone. She unwraps the pebble and he can hear her musical laughter as she reads that she is his adored one, his madonna, his queen. She leans out of the window, wraps her handkerchief around the pebble which she returns, and tells the romantic little boy that children of his age ought to be in bed at this hour. That is all.

Solterre, her husband's nephew, who is only fourteen years old, knows about the handkerchief incident and hates her beyond endurance. She is flirting with his friend as if she were a flapper. The next day George Neilson and the Viscount de Solterre return to school, and George feels quite grown-up with a love of his own to nurse and to dream over. By that time Eleanor has forgotten all about the strange boy who adored her. She is, herself, falling deeply in love with someone else. George Neilson hears rumours of a scandal concerning her, from Solterre, who detests her; but nothing definite reaches him until a year later, when all the world is told that Lady Barthone has divorced her husband and is going to marry the man she has been in love with all the time. Solterre sneers; his uncle has quite obviously given Eleanor the divorce, to release her like a gentleman. After all, what does he care? Their only child is a girl; she can have it. Good luck to her with that South American Spaniard she is marrying! But for George the end of the world is at hand. When he recovers he is like a new person; like a strange insect that has emerged from a chrysalis. The other day he heard from Solterre that Eleanor was ill in Paris. Ill with that "flu" people are dying of. Well, well, that's all past, and so long ago. She was very pretty.

That's the other story.

The omnibus shook and trembled so that it made his head nod.

Back to the studio in St. John's Wood which he shared with his brother and a friend. Back to that rut of Freedom. To-day he felt that in twenty-seven years he had already tasted all the joys life held for a man. Even marriage, seven years ago, which had not been a joy. *Æstheticism* and the letting loose of

the Beast in him, for a while, in the War. Travel in America and Canada; from Norway to Constantinople after the War. What poor creatures were those who were content to live in one town when there was the whole Earth to be seen! Equally foolish were those who loved and were faithful to one ideal, to one person, when there were so many movements to be studied, so many human characters to be understood. And yet, and yet . . .

There was the boredom of being continuously adored, being everlastingly found interesting, amusing, extraordinary. Flappers with round eyes who criticized or loved, according to the way he treated them. Fat ladies in furs who asked him to their houses. Widows who offered—what he took. His friend, Solterre (Sol), who mentally walked arm-in-arm with him to show Society that Neilson was irreproachable. Honor Pembroke, so beautifully American, with her lily head and fleshless body of abnormal length, and a brain like a piece of fly-paper that everything stuck to. Honor tried to prove Neilson more of a Bohemian than he really was, in order to satisfy her craving for unconventionality. And she surrounded herself with Lord de Solterre, Neilson, or Neilson's young cousin, Sir Alban Lodder, wherever she went. Young Sir Alban was a baby of twenty-four whom everyone liked because he never disturbed, and one could see through him like a piece of glass.

Oh, they were all right, of course, and he was very fond of them all; and the entire *clique* was naturally talked about as if it were a kind of sacred Brotherhood that one could not join unless one was very unusual. And yet friends brought their friends: his brother, Gabriel Herbert, introduced James Drayton,

the little painter with the nervous laugh, who in turn brought Aline St. John, the sleepy "Sparrow"—that queer creature who afterwards illustrated Neilson's books.

Oh, yes, he was surrounded by fame in every way. Was he not the brother of the illustrious actor, Gabriel Herbert? Gabriel was very handsome, and London's *matinée* idol. John Parnell lived with them, and John Parnell was the best known of all the singing-teachers. Neilson was a famous poet of his time. And they all lived together, they and their inefficient manservant, in a neglected place in St. John's Wood.

That indeed is genius, ladies and gentlemen!

At last he arrived, and the feeling of depression still with him, swung into the house.

He was greeted by a visitor. It was Solterre, who had been waiting for him, and who seized him eagerly by the hand as he entered.

"Is Parnell giving a lesson?" Neilson asks immediately.

"No, there is no one in the studio. I have news for you!" cries young Solterre.

"What is your news? I am depressed. I expected to have to entertain Señorita Martinez . . . I am glad she did not come. Well?"

"Neilson, do you remember Eleanor Barthone?"

Neilson stares. "This is telepathy," he murmurs, "I have been thinking of her all afternoon."

"You know what happened to Eleanor when she divorced Old Growly? You remember she went to America and after a year she married that Spaniard, Phillipa Martinez's father?"

"Well, what about it?"

"Well," said Solterre, "Barthone and Eleanor had no son—that is why Barthone let her go—but they had a daughter who was in Eleanor's custody. Eleanor died in Paris some months ago. . . ."

"Eleanor is really dead?"

"Yes, dead as a door-nail, but the daughter flourisheth. And to crown it all she is coming to live with her *cher papa* at Barthone."

"Poor kid. Old Growly is hardly fit company for a child!"

"I agree. Jingo! a kid at Barthone! . . . And you know the Martinez girl?"

"I know her, yes. She is Parnell's pupil. I expected her this afternoon. Devilish handsome. Triplex of her race too. Madly in love with herself."

"And with you?"

"Not yet. That is still to come; looking forward to it. What is the name of Barthone's girl? She's in London, of course?"

"I believe she is still in Paris. Her names are Christyn Henrietta, I know, from an old book at Barthone."

"If she had been a boy you would not have been Viscount de Solterre."

"Don't talk drivel. Of course I should have been Viscount de Solterre!" He laughed gleefully and crossed his legs. "Don't you realize that your friend is a peer of the realm in his own right? Don't you realize that you are honoured by my friendship? Ha-ha! Thank heavens for that, Neilson, or I should be devilishly in the hands of Old Growly."

"Thanks for the information. At least I know whom it was I saw to-day."

"Whom did you see, Neilson?"

"I saw Eleanor's girl in the Brompton Road." Neilson stretched his legs.

"Impossible. She is not here yet; she is still in Paris, and arrives at Barthone next week for Christmas." Solterre helped himself to one of Neilson's cigarettes.

"You must introduce Eleanor's girl to me," said Neilson, "and then I shall have made the acquaintance of both her and the Spanish lady, her step-sister!" He yawned.

Solterre looked at Neilson thoughtfully and slowly shook his head.

"If Old Growly permits it," he replied. "And you know how Old Growly loves you! Remember, she is a Solterre."

"So are you a Solterre—a precious Solterre; in fact *the* Solterre! And yet we are friends in spite of my Lord Barthone's objections to me!"

"I snap my fingers at my Lord Barthone. But his fifteen-year-old daughter can hardly do the same. It is because I am also a peer in my own right, not only Barthone's heir, that I can afford to disobey him. Besides, I don't trust you with her, Neilson! Stick to Mademoiselle Martinez—she is surely more amusing!"

"She is amusing. But . . . Eleanor's child is more than fifteen, Sol. . . ."

"Not very much. She is probably uninteresting too, compared to your Spanish friend."

"But she is Eleanor's daughter, and I should like to see the daughter of my first love! But oh, Bejabers! It does make me feel old to think of Eleanor's daughter! I have felt old all day, Sol, and this tale of yours does not help matters."

"You are an ass, Neilson. It is because you live

with older men that you feel like that. Gabriel is over thirty-five, and Parnell is forty-one! They are old geese, and so are you!"

"Don't, please—Viscount de Solterre."

"What's up? Where is Parnell? And, what's more important: where is Mademoiselle Martinez?"

"Oh hush! I don't like that kind of joke. Don't be so devilish hale and hearty. Only Eleanor's daughter could console me at this moment. She would act upon me much as vaccination does upon a would-be victim of small-pox."

"You are strange in this mood, Neilson. I don't know you. You are discontented to-day and make even me feel thoroughly uncomfortable."

"My dear Sol, I know I am not in pretty form to-day."

"Do you know what you want? You want a real friend, Neilson."

At this stage Neilson lifted his eyebrows questioningly and smiled. Darling young Sol—— But Solterre continued with somewhat dogged magnificence: "Yes, I mean it. A man slightly older than you, a man without Parnell's middle-aged childishness. As for Gabriel, he could be a flapper, considering his frivolity . . . no, you need a man you could look up to, respect, whom you could like better than yourself. . . ."

"Thank you, Sol, but I do not feel inclined to rick my mental neck in looking up to anyone, however weary I am of squinting down my nose—both physically and metaphorically—at my present acquaintances."

This time it was Sol's turn to sigh. "Yes," he acquiesced. "You are depressing."

"You poor thing. The point is that I do not want

to be cheered up. This phase is too interesting for me to desire it past. The difference between an artist and an ordinary mortal is that an artist will always profit by introspection and create something from it, while to the average creature such suffering is hideous because it is apparently useless. Pain is a Mother, and the Artist is a Father, and only that Art which is born of these two will survive, because it makes Pain divine. You know what I'm driving at, Sol. I'm not being original."

"That's been said before. Besides, it's a horrible theory. And why this sudden asceticism? Who have you been reading? Oscar Wilde?"

"Don't make a prig of me. I am already that most difficult of all characters—a mystic," continued Neilson, with a gentle smile. "I explore the soul, and the soul alone interests me. The road to the soul is through the body; the road to Heaven is through Hell; the road to Joy through Pain. Amen. I am spouting platitudes. I interest myself vastly."

"Monstrous!" cried Solterre. "You make a mean thing of Happiness, whereas it is the most ennobling thing in life! Pain is ugly, and all that is ugly is rotten and decadent. For God's sake don't go in for that piffling 'melancholy' business."

"Melancholy? That dark widow of Poetry who sells herself to the first ne'er-do-well who finds himself unemployed?" Neilson laughed. "Not I. Melancholy is the ivy clinging about the tree, beautiful and suffocating. Of course one can prefer the ivy to the tree. Look at life and grow sad. Excessive happiness and any tremendous indulgence in sorrow belong only to the very selfish, but great joy can come to all thinkers as can a fearful grief. Joy

and pain are climaxes, and happiness and sorrow are milder and more permanent. We cover Pain's nakedness, for as we are materially, so we are emotionally, prudes. Nude Pain is to be revered, and it is the clothes of Joy she wears which make her hideous, because deception will always be hideous. Joy and Pain are sisters: you cannot know one without the other, and in your happiest moment you will find your heart vaguely clutched by something hurtful and pleasant, by that very melancholy we decry, and then you will know what I mean."

" 'Joy,' 'Happiness,' you are splitting hairs. It's asinine. I have felt joy many times without the slightest sensation of melancholy, and I assure you, pain innumerable times without enjoying it a bit! Your theory doesn't hold! "

Neilson smiled benevolently at his younger companion.

"My delightful Sol," he said, "you are precious to me because you are essentially a son of Happiness. Time after time you have told me that you feel you are by no means an artist, either in temperament or literally: allow me to agree with you to-day. You have escaped the worst tragedy: artistic temperament without artistic aptitude. You hate suffering because it is absolutely useless to you, and for this reason you shun it. Melancholy inspires me. You do not know Melancholy, and I hope you never will, because it will do you no good whatever—you will create nothing from it. So many futile youths and maidens nurse it as hospitals nurse idiots. I should hate you to suffer, Sol, hate it more than I can express, because it would be useless. You are a Human Being, a son of Life—not Art! "

"Perhaps you are right, I love life, and am

perfectly content to leave Art to you ! ” But Solterre was piqued.

“ But I am not content to leave Life to you entirely ! I love Life and Art equally, just as I love joy and pain. That is another thing I want to discuss : we are inherently selfish, we men, and forget to love that which we do not desire.”

Solterre rose, and placed one arm on the mantel-piece.

“ One can overdo metaphors, Neilson, and you are always ready to sacrifice logic to paradox,” he remarked, “ but at any rate you amuse me. And as you do not want to be cheered, I shall not attempt to cheer you.”

“ Dear Sol, I cannot think why I discuss pain with you of all people, who are so very happy. I do not cultivate you because you bring Melancholy to me, but just because you have no more realization of it than you have of fierce, passionate Joy. You are sunny and merry and intelligent—and you are not moody. Your doctrine is happiness. If I were a girl I should call you a ‘ Darling,’ because you are devoid of strong passions—no man of strong passions was ever called a ‘ Darling.’ ”

“ Thanks, Neilson. Altogether you make me out an unmitigated softy ! ”

“ What is a ‘ softy ’ ? I am a weakling ; a very efficient one too, chiefly because I fail to admire your strong brutes with leather faces and leather brains. I love my body very dearly. I have the asceticism of the sensualist. Do you understand me ? And because I am not an ascetic, I am an æsthete. It all comes down to an extreme consciousness of the body. I hate ugly noises more than you do. I hate bad food ; ill-fitting clothes would cause me sincere sorrow.

They hurt my soul. 'Through the senses shall ye be taught,' quoth Epicurus. I told you the road to the soul was through the body. 'By the desires of the palate shall ye reach the stomach,' say I. Art is Paradise, and discomfort is ugly and inartistic. We all want to go to Heaven."

"And yet artists surround themselves with untidiness," Solterre argued. "I confess I could not live in the surroundings of the average artist!"

"Nor could I—if I were not an artist, and only a Man. You must admit that my surroundings are at least picturesque, and I suffer from none of the things I describe to you. If I were a 'strong' man I should not object to having ruffled hair and an unshaven chin. I should treat women brusquely but well. As it is I prefer to be excessively polite to the ladies, but I confess I treat them swinishly."

"You would not treat Eleanor's child badly?"

"If I saw she was a fool, barring her youth, I should treat her as she deserved, and as I felt I must."

"You are a cynic and a pessimist!"

"Not at all. I am a realist—which is worse!"

"Ye gods! The day before yesterday you were romantic."

"I am still romantic to-day, in spite of my realism. Your words rather give away your view of life, you know! In the end it is I who am the optimist, because I find realism romantic, whereas it is you who are the pessimist because you immediately connect realism with the horrid things of life."

"I think you are effeminate, Neilson, I can't help it! Even your views on Joy and Pain are womanish, and the way in which you admire beauty. One can't argue with you. You quibble so, you are so illogical.

I could almost say it is prettiness you admire, not beauty ! ”

“ Oh, perhaps, perhaps ! I love anything which appeals to the five senses before it works through to the brain. If you think that prettiness ever gets to the brain eventually, then you may use your word instead of mine ! ”

Solterre laughed suddenly and held out his hand.

“ You are priceless, Neilson ! ” he cried, “ and at least I am amusing myself. I surrender ! ”

Neilson smiled and took the outstretched hand. “ I want a ransom,” he said.

“ What is it ? ”

“ I shall want to meet Eleanor’s daughter,” he replied, still smiling.

“ I shall do my best. And in return I shall demand to make the acquaintance of the Martinez girl before I go to Barthone.”

“ Very well. Next week. It is a pact.”

“ It is a pact.”

After Solterre left, Neilson hated both himself and Solterre.

CHAPTER II

SOLTERRE THE PLACE

BARTHONE. A straggling building from Tudor to Georgian, the main body of red brick, mellowed by time and the British climate. This house has a personality like a human being's and bears the name of Solterre. Solterre the Place. Its heart is old, is this oldest Solterre's, mainly Tudor; and within this heart rests a dining-hall, ah, what a dining-hall! Boisterous and oak-raftered. Here there were tankards once, and ale, and women unlike men, and coarse men like those in plays by Ben Jonson. Even now the faces of men and women, who never looked like their paintings, gaze down from the walls and help us to be respectable—which they never were.

There are children of the oldest Solterre; "Wings," they are called when they belong to houses and have been built on later. This house was once harsh, bright red and offensive, just like mankind, but age has done its work, as with mankind.

One wing is a dissolute youth with an air of neatness: there is the flavour of the Early Georgian about it, and in its heart it carries a ball-room with a parlour leading out of it. Powdered wigs, fans, snuff-boxes, minuets, gavottes, rose-and-ivory ladies on the shining floor, and ridiculous painted, fat, dissipated dowagers lining the walls. The parlour is a room of secret chuckles, coquetry and all the

delightful lack of honesty which constituted the especial charm of that period.

An annoying grand-daughter of the house is the Early Victorian conservatory, be-curved and crinolined and columned, with *frou-frou* and frills, fat angels blowing rainbow-tinted bubbles, pen-painting, Mrs. Browning, marble clocks and all that went with smug Victorianism at its height. Waltzes by Weber; "Il Bacio" was new.

Now, the house is hushed. Oh, how it is hushed and dull these days. People whisper in it and one wonders whether the old Solterres turn in their graves and mock. Waste of the old dining-hall, waste of the ball-room and parlour, wicked waste. They were witty and gay, the old Solterres, and the present Lord Barthone's grandmother was a painted lady when it was not the fashion for ladies to paint their faces; young Queen Victoria did not approve of her. It is unbelievable that her grandson should be so proper. For, oh heavens! Old Growly would shame the angels with his propriety! It is by his orders that the brocades in the parlour are covered with flowered cretonne; the ball-room door is locked and the sun-blinds are down. He must be some unaccountable throw-back, because even his favourite younger brother, that gallant soldier, the first Viscount de Solterre, was so exactly unlike him.

Old, old Barthone, full of dreadful old people and old memories. Old servants and an old dog—and a young footman with a maggot-pale face like death. This is Barthone, and Christyn came to it.

She sat alone in the car, which had been sent to London to fetch her, and now it completed its journey through the park and finally pulled up before the house which was her birthplace.

At that time it was Christyn the child, the ageless Christyn, the still, the calm of manner and stormy of spirit, whose soul had a perpetual ache in the throat from high tension, whose pale hands were so limp with life-fever, whose eyes were slumbrous and fire-pure; Christyn the white swan: water and wine Christyn sailed in before she was as yet eighteen years old, and yet, like a water-bird, she is white as ever. Straight and narrow as a shaft shot into water reaching its mark untwisted. That is what comes of loving nobody, of being influenced by nobody, and it is safe. It is safe because one might not love perfect people; in truth it is the perfect people one loves least, so that loving people is always dangerous. Christyn had yearned over her mother and worshipped her as one worships actresses. Alas, wept her heart, that her own mother should be so, her beautiful, selfish and adorable mother. That is not filial love, the love of a child for a mother who influences her, but the love of a mother herself for any weak thing, which is frequently found in many young girls.

Odd Christyn, shy Christyn, Christyn the helpless child who would like to cling and trust and be influenced, who longs to make someone else responsible for her attitude to life, her doings, her all. Christyn, who is not too sure how one behaves, what is "done" and what is not "done." Christyn, who has made up her mind to be conventional and sweet, because it is right for young girls to be sweet; Christyn, who has told herself that she will place herself blindly in the hands of her newly-found family, this Christyn came to Barthone.

Feeling as stiff as if she had not moved for months, and very strange and nervous, she walked into the hall as the butler ceremoniously swung open the two large

doors. A log fire was burning in the fireplace. In the hall the oak-panelling was low, and above it hung more portraits of those who had inhabited Barthone since 1560, at which date the Huguenot Solterre had fled from France to the Court of Good Queen Bess; the ceiling was as high as the house, and there was a gallery facing the entrance, for the hall took the place of a courtyard. In spite of the big fire the place looked gloomy.

There was no relative or friend to welcome Christyn; the butler was old and silent: there was a flunkey who, without a word, but with a sullen expression, took her dressing-case and a hat-box, and marched up the stairs with them.

"If you please, milady, his lordship will see you in the library later. You must be very tired, and he thinks you would like to go to your room and rest before dinner, which is at eight o'clock." And the butler showed her up to her bedroom in the left wing.

How small and lonely she felt! How cold and disciplined and formal they were! This was her home; these were her people; she was a Solterre.

In her room (typical of Barthone it was, furnished in oak with a four-post bed and purple hangings) she found a dignified person in black waiting for her. The person was a little more friendly, and was about fifty years of age.

"Good evening, milady, have you had a pleasant journey?"

Milady? Oh, of course, she was a Solterre. Poor Christyn, and her feverish impatience with life.

"Oh, quite nice, thank you, but I am a little tired. I am so glad you are not dumb, and condescend to talk to me. What is your name?"

The person smiled awkwardly. "Oh, no one is

dumb here, milady, only Mr. Parkes the butler is rather silent. He and I have been here for thirty years, milady. My name is Pender."

"Pender? I have never heard the name. Is it a surname?"

"Yes, milady."

"Oh, of course, it must be! But I shall call you by your Christian name . . . may I not?"

"I would rather you called me Pender, milady."

"Oh! Are you the housekeeper, Mrs. . . . or is is Miss Pender?"

"Just plain Pender, milady. I am to be your personal maid, milady."

Christyn sighed. She would have a bath and rest, she said, while Pender unpacked. A model of servants was Pender. So systematic and efficient. Christyn had some pretty clothes, but hardly any dressing-table implements. She would wear a simple black velvet dress, and it was laid out for her. Pender became more talkative as she hooked her gown and dressed her hair. Christyn smiled as she remembered the slip-shod, very young maid she had shared with Phillipa Martinez. Pender coiled the thick bronze curls around the girl's head, and arranged the low web-lace collar.

Then it was that Christyn forgot she was a Solterre and felt like a Martinez. In Spain Christyn had been appallingly English; in England she felt abominably Spanish. A stranger everywhere.

"Oh, Pender, will my father like me, do you think?" she asked, once.

"Oh yes, milady," said Pender. "You are so like poor Lady Barthone!"

"Good gracious," sighed Christyn, "I know I am. That won't help me any!"

"Lord de Solterre is coming to-night," informed Pender, and for the first time her face lit up with enthusiasm. "You're sure to like him, he's the loveliest young man in the land. Oh, he is lovely!"

"Really?" said Christyn. "I'm glad to hear he's nice."

"Nice? Why, I'm simply gone on him, so is everyone! He's that tall with curly gold hair and merry blue eyes and a lovely figure, and such a smile. He always called me his 'Pender darling' ever since he was a little boy, he did."

"That is my first cousin, the Viscount de Solterre you are speaking of?"

Yes, it was. And the day after to-morrow two of his friends were coming. Very nice young lady one of them was.

"Anything else I can do?" she added.

There was nothing, and Christyn prepared to go downstairs to meet her father. On the threshold she stopped and asked:

"Has my father ever mentioned me to anyone?"

"Never, milady, until a few days ago when we received the message that you were coming and were told to get your things ready. I was told I was to look after you."

"Tell me, please. He never took any interest in me—when I was small? Please tell me!" Very tentative and shy was Christyn.

Pender could not remember. She was obviously embarrassed. It was evident that she resented the question. It was not in her place to answer such as this, and Christyn felt guilty of tactlessness to have asked it.

Christyn walked down the stairs alone, with weak limbs and a hollow sensation about the stomach. She

knew that she was pale; she felt as though there were not sufficient blood in her to be distributed evenly in her body. Her heart was too heavy with it, as it thumped in rebellion, and her feet were weighed down by that which should have strengthened her knees and coloured her cheeks. The hair on her head felt like wire.

She was to meet her father. This was her home, home, *home*! She tried to realize that she was a human being like others, and not a curious bodiless entity that looked on at everything. She tried to think, but her brain felt like a bird in her head, beating its wings against the bars of a cage. She completely forgot all the stage-tricks she had planned for her meeting with her father. Christyn had stage-fright. She had planned that he would meet her, coldly perhaps, and she would win him with a smile, and kiss him, and talk away with no trace of self-consciousness. And slowly the ice would melt and she, alone, would be able to manage him in his old age by patience and sweetness and wit. Who was Little Lord Fauntleroy compared to Christyn? She had pictured the meeting: first a pretty curtsy; then a "May I kiss you, father?" and a gay laugh; she would lead him to a light and say: "Look at me closely; do you like me?" quite fearlessly; she would take care to make no awkward movement; she would not be at all shy, and perfectly poised, and would watch the pleasing surprise of it dawn on his old face in spite of his tremendous reserve.

And now she forgot her lines, she stumbled awkwardly and her courage almost failed her. Then her legs carried her down to the large hall where Parkes, the butler, was standing as though he were expecting her.

"His lordship is in the library," he said, and led the way.

He knocked and opened the door. As she stood before it, it suddenly seemed as if a veil had been lifted. All fear left her and all self-consciousness. An ecstasy seized her. What was there to fear? An old man? She was beautiful, fascinating, young and alone. He *must* welcome her. She would be a draught of fresh air in his gloomy life. He was her father, father! She mouthed the word lovingly. She was not afraid. She walked in.

The picture she saw before her astonished her. Playing at cards by the fire sat an old Solterre and a young Solterre. They had not been speaking, and looked up as she entered. Both stared a moment before the young one jumped up, and the old one rose, stiffly. No one spoke as she moved forward. Then :

"Oh, there you are," said Lord Barthone, and took her hand. He leant forward and kissed her hair, dryly. She smiled up at him; then in silence she shook hands with the young man whom she knew to be cousin, the Viscount de Solterre.

Most of what Pender had said about him was true. But to her he looked reserved in spite of his cheerful smile. A Solterre, of course; tall and lithe, with gold curls and fine hands, but without Christyn's violet eyes, for his were piercing and light grey.

Christyn was still very pale when she sat down on a sofa near them. They spoke about the weather, and her journey, and Barthone.

"To-morrow," said her father, "Solterre must show you everything in the house and garden. We have a covered tennis-court, so if you care for a game . . . ?"

Yes, thank you, she played a little tennis, but not very well. Lord de Solterre surely played far too skilfully.

She must not call him Lord de Solterre, but Francis, said her cousin.

"Well, my name is Christyn," she said shyly. Oh, what it was to be shy!

"Good heavens, I know that!" he exclaimed with a grin. After a pause: "I have heard more about you through a friend of mine, Neilson by name."

"Neilson? I do not know Neilson. You are mistaken."

"Eh?" asked Lord Barthone abruptly, "what is that about Neilson again?" and he appeared a little displeased. "In another scrape, eh?"

"Oh, no," assured his nephew, "but I fancied that I had heard him mention . . . Christyn. He did not know her personally, but there was a lady there who knew her well."

"Who was it?" asked Christyn, interested.

Solterre feared that he had blundered. "Oh, I don't remember her name," he replied.

"What did she look like?" she insisted.

Solterre bit his lip with annoyance. "Oh, she's rather short, with black hair," he said.

"Ah!" Christyn faced him, and looked him in the eyes. Then said slowly: "That was the Girl with the Black Plaits, you know, who is my bad star. Everyone to whom she speaks about me, hates me at first. Everyone whom I love and who is ready to love me, she takes away from me. When I am with her, I behave like one possessed. If she has spoken to you of me—oh, you must be so prejudiced!"

"Not at all!" answered Solterre, gazing at her

with lifted eyebrows, "she only said you were pretty."

"That is all?"—with narrowed eyelids.

"Of course. She knew you were my cousin. I thought her awful fun, and devilish handsome."

"Yes . . . *devilish* handsome," repeated the girl. Then they both laughed.

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Lord Barthone.

"Of a young woman whom I know very well. My cousin has met her," said Christyn.

Then, mercifully, dinner was announced and no one spoke of the black-haired girl again.

Solterre watched Christyn closely during the meal, but the conversation was such as might have been between perfect strangers who would never meet again. A few questions on politics and social welfare (Conservative, of course), the weather and its relation to sport, old furniture and modern music, whether she danced and hunted. She danced and loved riding, but had never hunted; she did not shoot.

And so the dinner ended. It had consisted of a thin soup, white fish with pink sauce, roast lamb and mint sauce with boiled potatoes and Brussels sprouts, a rum trifle, a savoury dish and fruit. It was English. It was Solterre. Heavens! what a Martinez she felt.

After dinner they went into the small Georgian parlour. She eyed the piano longingly.

"Do play something," begged Solterre, "I am sure you play."

Christyn opened it a little nervously. "What shall I play?"

Then came that original answer: "Anything."

She smiled wryly as she heard the word, then opened with Schumann's "Arabeske." Of course,

when she had finished they both exclaimed "Thank you!" loudly, and hardly waited for the last notes to ebb away. She expected it.

"Now it is your turn!" she said to Solterre. "Do you play any musical instrument?"

"Only the banjo," he answered; then added hastily: "But I am very fond of real music, too!"

"You make a difference," she laughed. "I notice the fact that you do not consider a banjo an instrument of music."

"The Solterres are all musical," put in Lord Barthone sententiously.

Did she sing? Yes, a little, and she hoped to sing well one day. So she sang:

"Red roses are beautiful, pink ones divine,
But none sweet as yellow ones, mellow like mine!
And people love violets blue as can be,
But I love the white ones best, all pure like me!"

This was the burthen of her song. It touched them.

Solterre understood the pure, fine quality of her voice; it was as natural as the rippling of brooks, and the ease with which she sang was perfect.

"Where did you learn?" he asked. "With whom? Whose song is that?"

"I only learnt for a year in Paris," she replied, "and . . . I wrote the song!"

"You! You are a genius, I think! You do everything!" He bowed gallantly.

She sprang up and made him a perfect curtsy. Lord Barthone hummed and hawed. He was not displeased. Solterre was a strapping fellow, and the son of his favourite younger brother who had gloriously given his life for his country. The girl,

up to now, was all right. A pity that she was not his niece and Solterre his son.

"Did you write the words or the music?" asked Solterre.

"Both. I wrote the words many years ago, and unearthed them only quite recently, and then I set a tune to them, that's all."

Again they applauded her.

"It was suggested that I should have lessons here in London with John Parnell, but I had already begun taking lessons at the Academy. I do hope I shall be able to continue my lessons, but the Academy's no good, really. I *do* so want to study with Parnell."

Solterre looked across at his uncle, and smiled.

"I know John Parnell very well indeed," he said. "He shares a little house with my friend Neilson and his brother."

"Neilson?" she asked. "I do not know him, but the name is familiar; you mentioned him before this evening. Who is he?"

"A verse writer," said Lord Barthone.

"A poet," corrected Solterre.

"He wrote 'Earth's Champion,'" said Christyn with a sudden flash of memory, and quoted: "'Forgive him for he is a genius.' That line remained in my head."

"It should be applied to himself," said Solterre, amused. "He is a kind of genius, and I'm afraid there are lots of things to forgive in him! Your father, here, doesn't believe in the theory of that line you quoted. He only thinks of Neilson as a man, and the man he cannot forgive. Uncle Francis, it's a mistake!"

"A man should be a gentleman first, and a poet afterwards!" grumbled Lord Barthone.

"There would never be any artists in that case," remarked Christyn.

"That wouldn't be a pity," answered her father. "The world is overrun with them anyway."

Christyn was silent after that. Solterre only laughed.

Now she understood why her mother had left Barthone.

That night when she lay in bed, almost suffocated by the curtains, the canopy over her head and the soft feather pillows and mattress, she reflected on all that had happened to her. One moment she grew frightened about it, and the next she wriggled and pressed her hands to her eyes in the darkness for sheer excitement of the adventure. She was strained and strung and her limbs refused to relax, and she wondered what her life would be in the future. Young Solterre had impressed her and she wondered what would happen if they fell in love with each other.

But would there never be any women for her? Good God, never any women? No women and no love? Lord Barthone would never love anything but his tradition, his house, his name. Fine clothes and kind manners and all that money could buy because she was a Solterre, and a Solterre must be well-dressed and well-educated, and lack nothing. Friends? Surely a Solterre was sufficient unto himself. Solterre, nothing but Solterre—but no soul permitted.

No woman here at Barthone!

Young Solterre's mother was abroad for the winter and would only be back in the spring. Her son had not mentioned her once; she could not be very inspiring. Christyn did not pray to-night; she forgot. Also, she had not remembered to write in her diary.

Out of the darkness chimed a distinct church bell : one o'clock.

Then complete oblivion.

Lo ! the dawn is here already. Sleep again.

" Milady, I have brought your tea ! "

A sudden leaping up and rubbing of eyes. Where am I ? Oh, yes.

Christyn is a Solterre now : she scrambles into a flannel bed-jacket and smooths her hair with her hand, and obediently takes the tray on her knees.

Early morning tea is a truly English custom. Strange !

Nonsense, Christyn ! You are an English girl, not Spanish.

When Christyn had finished dressing she joined her father and cousin at breakfast. After this Lord Barthone declared that he must attend to his correspondence.

It was decided that Christyn and Solterre should ride before luncheon and look at the grounds, and that she should go over the house when they came back, because the sun was just then shining and it was thought wiser to profit by the good weather.

So Christyn, mounted on a bay mare which paced down the drive beside Solterre's grey one, waited for her cousin to speak, wondering what he would say. It was almost as if he divined what she was intending at first, for a faint teasing smile hovered around his mouth. At last he spoke :

" It seems impossible that you should stay here alone, once I am back in town. It will either drive you melancholy or kill you. It is only from sheer duty that I come here occasionally. It's a lovely place, and then I mostly fill it with rowdy acquaintances of mine, and turn it upside down. Old Growly comes

to town in the spring, and sometimes at Christmas, but he loves Barthone. I wish my mother were here to bring you straight back to town!" Then he added: "Of course you probably have heaps of friends whom you can ask to stay here with you? Two friends of mine are coming down to-morrow."

"I do not know a soul," she informed, briskly. "Is my father always . . . like that?"

"What, Old Growly?" he laughed. "So sorry! I don't want to sound disrespectful, but he *is* a wee bit like Dickens's 'Mr. Dombey.' Solterre, Solterre, Solterre! Solterre be damned—I beg your pardon!"

"You are a Solterre, you ought not to suffer," she said with a smile.

"I love being a Solterre—the Solterre, in fact! But"—he leant over to her and said earnestly, "look here! I won't let it interfere with my friendships and my own principles! I say: a human being first and then a Solterre. Uncle says: a Solterre by all means, even if a world cataclysm should take place!"

Christyn flirted. "*Noblesse oblige!*" she said, whimsically.

"Yes, I want to do the right thing always. But . . ."

"What is the right thing?"

"That's it! Is it the right thing to throw over a schoolfellow whom you are deuced fond of, because he keeps getting into more or less monstrous messes, and is now a dog with a bad name? A fellow who is as popular as he can be with those who know him, in spite of it all? Throw him up because he is an impossible Bohemian—(not your pretty kind, with velvet cushions and a huge lovely studio, and no work)—but a true artist? Only because I am a Solterre?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Christyn eagerly, "if you have a friend—oh, stick to him! Let nothing in the world part you! Love is so, so rare! You don't know how precious it is until you lose it. Even the most paltry affection."

Solterre looked at her sideways. "H'm!" he said, and remained in thought.

"Do you think I have been in love?" she cried. Then she went on quietly: "Oh dear no, nothing so romantic. I never had the chance of finding anyone worthy of my slightest consideration. It sounds conceited, doesn't it? Don't think that I have not met heaps and heaps of people: crowds of stupid boys who never think, and never have anything to say. The Girl with the Black Plaits—Phillipa Martinez, my mother's stepdaughter, has kept all friends from me. Everyone I ever knew I met through her or her father, and she cleverly managed that I should never be intimate with anyone. I am sure people are kind really, but they are so reserved. I loved my mother, worshipped her, like a distant star—she was so distant. I was never her friend. During my early childhood I played dolls with lots of little girls—that was all. After that we travelled, and I had a governess who taught me well, but adored Phillipa. They all loved Phillipa because she was so happy and engaging, while I was rather bitter and reserved. I felt a Solterre — desperately a Solterre — ridiculously Northern, and my mother wanted to forget everything Solterre. She was witty and talented and so was Phillipa, and I was only good-looking and a prig. I didn't want to show my wits in that circle; I knew I had wits, but there was a kind of spite in not letting them know. It's like my singing: my voice is far better than Phillipa's, and yet I would not sing before

people. I can dance, and I love it, but I let them think me heavy. They never saw what I wrote. I felt a sort of morbid pleasure in nursing my loneliness, and would have hated to have it disturbed. They were all so Latin; mother was Latin to excess; like all converts she overdid it. I was bottled up, and revelled like a miser in the knowledge of my hidden properties. But one has two hearts, and my inside heart, the one I never looked into, prayed that someone should take that bottle and smash it to pieces and cry: 'Sing! Dance! Speak! Sparkle! Let us see what you are!'

"Charming," said Solterre shortly. Some attitudes of Neilson's were contagious. Then he added: "Well, here we are, thank God!" and gripped her hand. "You'll have to be initiated, you know. Kind of club we've got, my friends and I. We'll smash the bottle."

"I was so bottled last night, although I had said to myself: 'In my home I shall be I.' Still, I have been more myself because there was no Girl with Black Plaits."

"But you don't feel much of a Solterre!" he remarked.

"Neither do you—at Barthone."

"No."

They both laughed. He liked her quaint manner of speaking. Such a delightful pose. Unconscious pose, of course.

She was happier now, although a little afraid of her late confidences.

"I am so glad we like one another," he said. "I was afraid you were fearfully dull, and I thought you were much younger. I like you awfully, Christyn, and we're going to be real friends."

"I like you too. You don't know what a real friend means to me. You must have lots."

"Yes, I have, but the finest of them all is that vagabond, Neilson, whom your father doesn't like. I am sure your father would never forgive me if I introduced him to you—so that's that! But I know some awfully nice girls whom I am sure you would like, and whom I will make you meet. You'll have to be initiated. Honor Pembroke arrives here tomorrow. She's one of them."

Again they clasped hands.

So it happened that next day there came to Barthone Hall two of Solterre's particular friends. There came the American heiress, Honor Pembroke, and the charming hale and hearty young baronet, Sir Alban Lodder of Fantenden, who was, by accident, a second cousin of George Neilson's.

They came to spend Christmas at Barthone and motored all the way from London to Somerset together, as Honor was modern and there was no nonsense about her. No, she was as beautiful as an angel with her halo of fair hair, and as witty as a magistrate, but there was no nonsense about Honor—Alban knew that; he knew he was one of many to enjoy her friendship; a friendship which he shared with Neilson and Solterre. Well, perhaps Solterre was her especial friend.

When they arrived, Christyn was sitting in the little Georgian parlour. She held a book, and self-consciously did not move when she already heard their voices outside the door. As they entered, she rose. Solterre was in an exuberant mood and forgot to introduce them. So she came forward and held out her hand to Honor.

"How-do-you-do? I know who you are. Please, I am Christyn de Solterre," she said.

Honor took her hand and smiled. "Why, you dear child," she exclaimed, and then laughed. "Why, you dear child!"

All manner of thoughts and phrases came into Christyn's head as she looked into Honor's face. Honor's eyelashes, for instance, reminded one of the leaves that are put round those bunches of violets one buys in the streets of London; her eyes were like the flowers with the lashes for the surrounding leaves. Except that her eyes were brown.

"Was it nice coming up in the car?" she asked.

"Oh, lovely!" said Honor. "We nearly froze."

Solterre drew Sir Alban towards Christyn. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he apologized, "I ought to have introduced you." And forthwith he remedied the error.

Sir Alban gave Christyn a frank stare accompanied by as frank a grin. It was quite pleasant as he had beautiful teeth and very blue eyes that seemed to sink deeper into his head when he smiled. But he had barely an opportunity of talking to her, for Solterre claimed him for a personal chat on subjects entirely unintelligible to Christyn. Honor burst into the conversation now and again, evidently understanding quite clearly what it was about, while Christyn was allowed to listen and wonder.

"It's Gaby who brings all that rabble there!" Solterre was saying. "I'm using Neilson's word 'rabble.'"

"Yes, and after all the Sparrow needn't be quite so clear as to her hobby. She tries one after the

other, and always nests back to Drayton—a monstrous curse on him!”

“Children, children!” cried Honor with charming gaiety, “don’t discuss these things before this innocent lamb! You’re both of you monstrous demoralizing!”

“I wish I knew what it was all about!” said Christyn simply and with sincerity.

Honor patted her hand. “You will, my dear, all in good time.”

Solterre nodded. “Yes, she’ll have to be initiated.”

“If Miss Pembroke will be so kind.”

“Miss Pembroke?” Nonsense, none of that here! It was to be “Honor” and “Christyn.” In “our set” it was always Christian names or nicknames or especial names. No formal mode of address tolerated. It was “Sol” for Solterre, and “Banny” for Sir Alban. Parnell and Neilson were only known by their surnames, and Neilson’s brother, Gabriel Herbert, was “Gaby.” Excepting Honor, the females that happened in Our Set were known by divers animal nicknames, and that section which frequented the St. John’s Wood studio of one George Neilson was called the “Menagerie.” It was all rather complicated at first. Certain words Christyn noticed were in favour, and certain slogans. “Monstrous” and “rabble” were the words, and “A house in the rain is worth two castles in Spain” was the slogan. Things were “monstrous lovely,” and food was “monstrous delicious,” and so on. If Honor came to fetch Christyn for a walk she would say “the rabble” was waiting in the hall, meaning Solterre, Sir Alban and other friends. The “rabble” meant sometimes a drawing-room crowd,

sometimes Our Set, and sometimes just people in general. Both words had come into use because Gabriel Herbert was acting in an eighteenth century costume play, from which he was wont to quote at great length. The slogan was Honor's own invention and was originally hurled at Neilson, when that gentleman had been heard to use amazing epithets concerning the national climate. It was now employed for all occasions, and particularly as an antidote to "if onlys" that were impracticable.

Sir Alban talked in initials and abbreviations, so that a gramophone became a "gram" and a motorcycle a "mo-byke," the post office a "P.O.," and Mr. Bernard Shaw, "old G.B.S."

It was most amusing when Christyn became accustomed to it. Especially when Alban fell in love with her but held his tongue. Honor continued patting her hand and calling her a dear child. (Honor was twenty years old.) Oh, what a child was Christyn!

They were all very nice and they all talked shop. Solterre was interested in politics and Alban thought he was. Honor was a Bolshevik and argued incessantly. Alban was one of the sunniest young men Christyn had ever met.

As for Solterre, he was her keeper and her friend. He talked shop worse than the others and showed off more; he aided Alban's conversation in initials, and helped Honor to talk down to Christyn. And yet he was wonderful and sweet and cheerful, and she loved him dearly.

But in the night she lay awake and wondered sadly. She was so alone. There was an impassable barrier between herself and the world. She longed for someone to come and break the barrier. She had thought

that Solterre would, but "Francis" had not yet perceived the barrier, because it lay between her soul and other people's souls.

A fortnight later Solterre's mother returned from abroad for Christyn's sake, and then they went to London.

CHAPTER III

THE STUDIO

THEY are a gay lot at No. 16! Right into the street the laughter and scurrying can be heard, and the singing of that crazy manservant! And goodness, if these are only the preparations, what will the tea-party itself be like? For we are all artists here. Everyone. Even Terry Bryan, the crazy manservant, is an artist. Mr. Neilson picked Terry up when he hadn't a penny, and Terry adores Mr. Neilson. Terry is splendid when he is not tipsy. But if he were not tipsy sometimes he would not be Terry. Mr. Neilson says that Terry ought to have been a poet.

Terry is singing his latest song—words and music by himself (and due apologies to the illustrious Solterre) :

“ Frankie, Frankie, Frankie!
Used his powder-puff and handkie,
While he oiled his curls so fair;
He was jolly, he was witty,
He was tall and he was pretty,
And he was *the* Solterre! ”

Mr. Neilson says that “ fair ” and “ Solterre ” are not good rhymes, but Terry says they are good enough for him. That is just Terry: Imperfection personified. Terry has an excellent voice with which to sing his songs, so Mr. Parnell, our eldest gentleman, who is a fine singer, offers to teach him; but Terry shakes his head: what God gave him first is good enough now; he will not be trained. He is

satisfied with the nasal tones he can produce : they are always in tune. Above all Terry is a comedian. He was once on the stage in the provinces, in the male chorus, and it was after he had lost his job there that Mr. Neilson had picked him up.

John Parnell is not as mad as Neilson, but madder than Gabriel Herbert. He is essentially a musician, and his voice is beautiful. Also, he is by no means a mediocre pianist, and even composes. He is of medium height and inclined to corpulence, with a mop of greying dark hair. His face is handsome because of his fine teeth and dreamy eyes, although he has a snub nose which gives him his benevolent expression. He is most romantic, and yet the roars of laughter, coming from his chest, can make the furniture rattle. John Parnell is simple, and consequently foolish. He is good. Sometimes he is a fool.

Gabriel Herbert, the elder of the two Neilson brothers, but by far the less important, in spite of his being an actor of no small renown, is the original friend and house-mate of Parnell. It is a pity that he acts the entire time and does not confine his histrionic talent only to the stage. He knows how good-looking he is, but is sorely afraid of being thought unæsthetic. Hence the languid eye, pale cheeks and manicured nails. If one were to ask him his name, he would reply that it was Gabriel Herbert. "Neilson" is forgotten. He left the name of Neilson behind him when he ran away from Oxford, from the weight of Papa and Mamma ; of Grandfather—the seventh Baron Hilford ; of nine other brothers and sisters ; of the most respectable and quarrelsome poverty. Yes, he ran away to the stage and that was a disgrace. He used his second Christian name for a surname and shared a room with a young

singer whom he met at a rehearsal. His temperament was an easy one. Heredity had not played any tricks with him. His mother was Irish, and he took after her quite straightforwardly, leaving it to his young brother George to labour under a divided inheritance of type. For Grandfather Hilford had married a Spanish lady which caused all kinds of complications; and Great-grandfather, whom he had never known, had espoused a Norwegian. Mamma herself was Irish, and young George so temperamental that he was well-nigh impossible to manage. At school he only made one friend, Lord de Solterre; the ordinary bluff and hearty British schoolboys he held in undue contempt and was consequently shunned by them. Especially did he hate all his nine remaining brothers and sisters. So one day, at the age of sixteen, he threw an elder brother out of the window at school. Very bad, but not bad enough. He repeated the performance a week later and was "asked to leave." It was his luck that the window was a low one, not his calculation. Brother might have been killed; it was hardly Neilson's fault that he was not. Half a year after this he took Gabriel's example and left home to join him and Parnell in ramshackle Chelsea "artists'" quarters. Both the older men had progressed considerably. They helped Neilson as much as possible and found him some work on a paper, pretending he was older than he really was. Then came the war. Parnell was caught in Munich and interned, but escaped eighteen months later. Gabriel was too delicate for the army, and performed for the soldiers, while Neilson wrote a great deal and continued his work until he was old enough to enlist.

After he became a soldier, his verse was published as if by a miracle: he was reported killed and Gabriel

brought out a collection of poems with a long preface to it. Marvellous infant prodigy just discovered. Then Neilson belied the reports and came back with only a slight wound.

Mamma and Papa reappeared, filled with pride, but were most unkindly turned away. What Gaby and Neilson had done, they had done for themselves. Papa Neilson thereupon furiously informed them both that they could henceforth consider themselves no longer his sons, which dismissal they received with equanimity. Since then they are both famous, more by sheer luck than anything else, having passed through a series of adventures which left them respectively frivolous and wild.

Gaby seeks pleasure and Neilson knowledge. Gaby likes and is amused by one James Drayton because he paints his eyebrows and is so hopelessly easy to bully and tease, thus providing one with laughter. Neilson amuses himself with Drayton's inseparable female companion, Aline St. John, because she is a creature who will allow herself to be studied. Neilson likes Honor Pembroke because she is intelligent. He enjoys one Phillipa Martinez because she is a lovely animal. He likes different towns and different climates, and he likes different women. He seeks one all-including town, one ideal climate, and one many-souled, many-sided woman. He seeks without the slightest longing or desire to find, but just leisurely and slowly.

To-day he is laughter-full and in a good mood. Terry always puts him in a good mood when he is not being tiresome. Terry is Neilson's devoted nuisance.

"Terry! How many cups have we?" shouts Neilson from the studio to the kitchen.

"Nine, sir!"

"How many are coming?"

"Let's count, sir: there's the Spanish lady and her chaperone, and the American lady, and two other ladies, and you three—that's eight! And one to spare!"

"Hooray! So I won't have to wait for my tea! How's your cake, Terry?"

"Goin' foine, sir!" Then, after some time: "Isn't Lord de Solterre coming?"

"No, I'm afraid not. He is looking after a fair cousin who is not allowed to know me."

"What!" shouts Terry from the kitchen, rattling some teacups, "not allowed to know you?"

"No, Lord Barthone is certain that I am too much of a rake!"

"Och!" says Terry indignantly, "his lordship had best keep his Solterres to himself!"

Terry is reprimanded and duly shouts his apologies from the kitchen, whence he later appears with the teacups and a cake of his own baking. Then he gives a final dusting to the studio and sings the second stanza of his song.

The studio is large and airy, and has an enormous fireplace which burns enough coal to bring revolt into the hearts of even these four Bohemians. But there it burns, the coal, and the huge grate will probably remain until the house is sold, although it is remarked upon daily.

There are just four rooms, besides the studio, excluding the bathroom. In the largest bedroom lives Neilson, because it is also his working-den, and his bed is a sofa in the daytime; Gabriel has the smaller; Terry has a fair-sized chamber, papered with photographs of various kinema stars, which leads from the

kitchen; John Parnell sleeps in the studio on a folding bed and has the right to chase you out of it any time of the day if he wishes to practise. Leading out of Terry's room is the kitchen. It is quite a usual thing to see Parnell at the piano, first thing in the morning, in his pyjamas, trying some difficult accompaniment. The kind-hearted ladies say that sleeping in a living-room is most unhealthy. The ladies are very rich; Parnell smiles. Parnell has pupils too. Real paying pupils, as well as a poverty-stricken schoolmaster's daughter who has an exceptional voice. One of them is a Spanish lady who is very attractive indeed. She does not pay as regularly as she comes to a lesson, but that does not matter very much. She spends much of her time chatting with George Neilson, too, who reciprocates her kind interest; but then she is full of charm.

And now comes a curious tale:

Christyn de Solterre has become a pupil of John Parnell's. It is quite true, and she is exceedingly talented, says John Parnell, although at first he coldly refused to see or hear her. That was because Solterre had frankly told Neilson of Lord Barthone's wish that his daughter should not be at all intimately acquainted with the trio.

"She is very young," Barthone had said, "and your friend very attractive when one knows nothing about him. She is sure to be charmed with his manner, and I do not think he is the right type of man for any young girl to cultivate. However, as she must learn singing from John Parnell, let her meetings with the latter be purely those of master and pupil, adequately chaperoned, so that there should be no development of friendship whatever."

Of course Parnell became angry and pronounced Barthone's speech "Damn cheek."

This wakened Neilson's sense of humour; he begged Parnell to see that marvellous Solterre girl, if only once, to find out what she was really like. What a paragon of a daisy she must be, that so much fuss should be made over her! She is probably pretty and deadly stupid. Nevertheless, Solterre says she is very charming and amusing indeed. Neilson is, on the whole, rather curious by now, and his thirst for adventure is fully whetted.

So it happened that Parnell went to Solterre's house in London and gave the Solterre girl a lesson.

"Ah, you artist!" Neilson laughs at him, "this time you are caught. Caught and held and led by the nose, or rather by the ears, just because the artist in you triumphs over the well-principled human being."

The throat of the Solterre girl is golden; she has tremendous talent! Parnell forgets that she is the daughter of the man who has painfully insulted his friend, and that he came to her house with the one idea of snubbing her. Enthusiastically he consents to teach her; and he arranges the date for her first lesson. His art has made a fool of him . . . and he is only too glad, the Fool!

This afternoon Parnell and Gabriel join in the second stanza of Terry's song, while he dusts the china and sets a few chairs straight.

"Frankie, Frankie, Frankie!
He was neither long nor lanky,
He was only slim and tall.
Oh, his rowdy friends adore him,
And they always stand up for him,
For the heir of Barthone Hall!
Hooray!"

Gr-r-r! The front-door bell! A visitor already! Terry runs to the door.

"Ah, Señorita Martinez! How are you?" cries Neilson, coming forward and seizing both his visitor's hands. "Come in and get warm by our unsurpassable hearth!"

"Good afternoon," purrs Phillipa charmingly, with the delicious foreign accent she has cultivated for years. "It is . . . how you say? . . ." wrinkling her nose, and lifting one black eyebrow—"it is devileesh windy!"

She enters, followed by another, an elderly woman, sighs, pulls off her fur coat and then stretches her plump white hand towards the flame with a satisfied "Ah!" while Neilson chats on, and Gabriel and Parnell greet her and attend to the Duenna. They take chairs and sit around the fire.

"And how is Meestaire Neilson's pretty friend?" she asks with a smile.

"I think she felt a little cold owing to the wind, but feels warmer now!" he replies, laughing.

"Oh, damn gallant!" says Phillipa, showing her teeth, "but I do not mean that pretty friend, I mean the nice gentleman, Lord de Solterre!"

"Pretty? He'll be pleased, good Lord!" laughed Neilson.

"Yes, he is a good little lord!" she sighs, "damn good." (The chaperone sighs an echo.)

"In England," says Gabriel, imitating Solterre, "young ladies do not swear, except upon very enervating occasions."

"No? Damn silly of them. But I am not conventional, you know." (The chaperone nods.)

"I know that," says Neilson dryly.

"Eh? But it is true that the leetle lor-rd is most good, no?"

"Oh, rather, but he isn't coming, I'm afraid."

"No? Oh, what a pity! I call him my little cousin! Christyn is—er—my sister? You smile? Oh, well, call her my sister so that Lord de Solterre becomes my cousin! He makes a very nice cousin!" She raises her left eyebrow again and laughs merrily.

Soon there are fresh arrivals. The American girl with two friends come in and are greeted quite effusively. The American girl takes Neilson by the arm and draws him to the light, gazing at him attentively.

"Neilson," she says, after a pause, "you have grown mutton-chops on your cheeks!"

"Honor," he replies, "they make me beautiful. You know that."

"Neilson, my dear friend, you are always beautiful, but you are so dark, and the Spanish is now so absolutely prevalent. Shave them off!"

If Phillipa were really an animal she would prick up her ears, physically, at Honor Pembroke's familiar speech. As she is only human, she laughs.

"Oh, so *intime*? Mees Pembroke calls you 'Neilson,' not even 'George'! That is not permitted!"

"I am never called 'George,' dear Señorita, because of all names it is my particular abhorrence. I would beg you to imitate Miss Pembroke in this habit: nothing would honour me more!"

"They call you just 'Neilson'?" and as he nods, "and your brother?"

"My brother is known as 'Gaby' to his friends. And even he calls me 'Neilson.'"

"The Neilson, then?"—again with one raised eyebrow. "The great poet Neilson!"

"Thanks—Phillipa?"

"All r-right." (This chaperone is very useful, and great, great friends with her charge.)

"Good, we're getting on!" He turns to Honor Pembroke, "You see we have another recruit, Honor, and our society increases."

"Shave off those whiskers," is Honor's reply.

"Is that your last word? Shame!"

But Phillipa must be queen! She is the centre and will remain so.

"Well, *the* Neilson, where is *the* Solterre to-day? You did not tell me?"

"Do you know Sol?" asks Honor quickly.

"Oh, most ver-ry well!" answers Phillipa languidly.

"Having met him exactly once!" puts in foolish Parnell.

"Tactless ass!" remarks Neilson good-humouredly, and adds in a whisper: "Look after the Duenna!"

Now Phillipa leads the conversation. She is quite the most powerful of the three girls, in looks and wits. As much as Honor's pretty fair hair and dewy eyes are eclipsed by the dusky tresses and flashing glances of the Spanish girl, so her subtle humour passes unnoticed beside Phillipa's bold anecdotes.

Phillipa must be queen—or leave. A queen or nothing.

The other two girls are ordinarily pretty and out of the running altogether. They do not talk much, and listen patiently to the sallies between Neilson and Phillipa which are occasionally interrupted by Parnell or Honor, thus providing an admirable chorus. Gabriel, who hates dealing with sparkling women, is solely occupied with this chorus and their comforts.

We are all modern here and the ladies smoke as

many cigarettes as the artists, and the chaperone is a sport.

Soon the atmosphere of the studio is blue with smoke, and there is a cheerful hum of voices. But raised above all the others is that of Phillippa Martinez.

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTYN

CHRISTYN was at this time staying at the Solterres' London residence in Brook Street with Solterre's mother, whom she found to be a kindly, conventional, middle-aged lady whose existence one was tempted to forget when she was not there. Amelia, Lady de Solterre's sole aim in life was to receive the approval of the Solterre males, and to be allowed to follow a certain yearly, and even daily, routine, without too much interruption.

Christyn, when she arrived in London at the beginning of March, was duly trotted round to a series of matinées and tea-parties, which she enjoyed as much as she was expected to. She was introduced to half a dozen, at least, of "nice" girls of whom Aunt Amelia approved; girls who had positive talent for talking cheerfully to each other and saying nothing at all—a herd of Vivyans, Joans, Lettices and Bettys who had all known each other at school, and who regarded Christyn with an air of pity because she had missed the joys of a jolly English childhood. Francis's acquaintances, all of them, and Banny Lodder's; the sisters of school-friends. Christyn felt bewildered. Bobby This and Billy That and Jimmie So-and-So. More pity was bestowed upon her when she showed her ignorance of the identity of these young demi-gods. Life centred around them, and she

did not even appear to realize it. She felt self-conscious and stupid, and a wet-blanket. Also her vanity smarted because she was tolerated, not desired.

Thank heavens for Honor Pembroke, the American girl, Solterre's special friend. At least she was fond of books and such things, and talked well, and Christyn liked her because she was good company and interested in nearly everything. A hunter of Experience, because Life had done its best to keep it well away from her, she was impatient of the leading-strings her sex and youth threatened to trammel her with, and feared the conventions as she feared spiders—(so she told Christyn). She also said that there was nothing in the world as adorable as Bohemianism with bathrooms. Christyn nodded. It was nice to be instructed by someone who knew as much as Honor.

One day, during a discourse on such subjects, Honor asked Christyn whether she had yet made the acquaintance of Neilson.

Christyn replied that she had not.

"Sol's best friend?" Honor exclaimed in surprise. "You must!"

"Honor," Christyn hesitated. Then she said with exaggerated sweetness: "My father does not wish me to know the poet."

"What? How absurd! But I thought you mentioned having lessons with Parnell?"

"That is where my father ceases to have any common sense whatsoever. He intends to have me taught singing by one of Neilson's best friends, and doesn't take into consideration that, of course, John Parnell will only find the offer impertinent and refuse to teach me. I shall lose the benefit of having Parnell for a teacher because of a whim!" She made a gesture of helplessness.

Honor merely laughed, but a trifle angrily. It always annoyed her when girls were as submissive as all that. "But how perfectly ridiculous! I never heard of such a thing! We're in the twentieth century, my dear, and I should do as I pleased."

"You are in the twentieth century, Honor, but I . . ." Christyn laughed, "I am a Solterre!"

"Don't be snobby, child!"

"I hate quarrelling. I don't think any man—even your marvellous Neilson—worth a quarrel with my poor old father. I confess I object to forfeiting Parnell as a master."

(Oh, docile and meek Christyn!)

"You do not forfeit Neilson and Parnell only, you forfeit your freedom," Honor insisted.

"Freedom! What a word! What is this Freedom, Honor?" It amused Christyn to aggravate Honor with her stupidity.

"Good heavens! Are you really nearly eighteen? And you let Old Growly choose your friends for you? And give up your only wish because of . . . of . . ."

"As a matter of fact I have never found out why I mustn't meet Neilson. Has he a 'past'?"

"Oh, well! We're in the twentieth century, after all!" Honor tossed her head. "It's true he was sent away from public school when he was sixteen because he threw his brother out of the window. Miraculously the boy was practically unhurt, and all might have passed over if he hadn't done the same thing again a week later for the same reason. That time it nearly killed him. But, worst of all, when he was twenty, he married an actress and divorced her again within the year. Your father was absolutely overcome with horror at this, and nearly fought with Sol because he stuck up for Neilson. Neilson's been

all sorts of things, from an office-boy to the leader of a Movement. Nobody minds a man because he's had experience. He's one of our best modern poets, and received everywhere—it's absurd!"

"I don't think it is socially that my father objects to Neilson as much as personally." Christyn began to feel unhappy at being forced to defend her father. It was a shame to have to defend one's father—even from respectability.

"Of course!—but you live like a nun in a convent!"

"Don't be unkind, Honor," said Christyn, frowning. Honor mustn't nag. Christyn was quite ready to be honest. "I know it all. The monotony is beginning to drive me mad. My only recreation is an afternoon like this, or a theatre—and Auntie likes to choose the play. I long to break out; it would do me good to swear. This is the sort of day I spend: I breakfast in my room, and then I walk in Hyde Park with my aunt, and then perhaps we go shopping. We lunch at home, Auntie, Francis and I, and then Auntie takes a nap, and then Francis takes me to a theatre (where I oughtn't to be seen because I am in mourning) with some friends of his, or we go to a tea that isn't important enough to matter. Occasionally we dine with dull people who don't dance, because it wouldn't do to hop about. Oh, Lord, do you think I don't know it's deadly? A rest-cure for a few weeks, perhaps—but to live like that!" She made a grimace and shook her head.

"It's a shame," said Honor with energy, "and it's got to stop. I'll speak to Sol. He's your cousin, after all, and can interfere." Thank God the child was rebelling a little herself.

A few days later, to Christyn's immense surprise,

she was told that the singer, Parnell, was willing to hear her after all, and that he would call on her himself.

Her delight over the consequences of the interview was boundless. She told herself she had to work now, and Mr. Neilson and "Freedom" could go to the dogs. But Honor Pembroke, that young lady of the twentieth century, did not rest at that. Did she not know that even work becomes tedious? Christyn must meet the illustrious Neilson—because disobedience in this case meant Freedom. Freedom! That grand word of the twentieth century!

Honor tackled Solterre. The way that child was neglected was a disgrace. Like a Miss of 1840—that was it. And Christyn herself was a temperamental little thing, too, and there was lots to be made of her.

Solterre felt a little guilty. Perhaps he had been rather selfish; just glad to know she was there.

She looked so meek, it was difficult to broach the subject. He hit the ice with a sledge-hammer.

"Poor Christyn," he said, "you never go anywhere where you can air your brains! But where can you go? Life just isn't amusing for young, well-chaperoned débutantes like you!"

"Must I be a well-chaperoned débutante?"

"Ah," returned Solterre pensively, and looked out of the window.

"I am almost getting used to it," she replied, and he imagined he could discover something smouldering in her lassitude. He was right, for she quite suddenly burst out: "It's because your friends are dull, and Life itself is dull in this select circle. I long to do something to disturb the placidity of you all!"

He had smashed the ice with a vengeance.

"My life is a routine—the motto being 'The

Correct Thing,' and one's body is one's idol. The mind is allowed to die for all one cares, for want of stimulating. It's chatter and prattle from morning till night. You have your friends to fly to, but excepting Honor Pembroke and a few glimpses of Banny, I only see Aunt Amelia's friends."

He put an arm around her shoulders protectingly. "There's me, you know," he said.

"Yes, Francis, thank you, I realize that. Oh!" she exclaimed, blushing, "I haven't been kissed since my mother died—not kissed as if they meant it!"

"Would you like me to?" he asked, laughing again.

"No thank you!" she answered, subdued, "but Honor might. But of course she is modern."

She asked herself why Solterre had suddenly talked to her like this. And why was she not saying anything that counted? She watched him. He was studying her; looking as if he understood something she did not understand herself.

After a pause he said, quite irrelevantly: "Let me take you to a theatre on Friday. There's a topping play at the Shaftesbury."

She accepted his offer. At the moment she felt like a stagnant pool that needed fresh water, which someone had sought to improve by stirring with a stick. Poor Francis! He meant it so very well. He could provide new entertainments, certainly, but what she craved for was a change of atmosphere, new ideas, outside opinions: the opinions of people completely removed from her circle; a totally different view of life. How could she tell which were the things that counted? How did she not know that her mountains were not mole-hills? She had no figure of comparison. She had lost perspective, she felt, and Life in its

great lines was escaping her. Everything was exaggerated in this Society. One made much of whether a dance was a success or no, and whether Mrs. So-and-So was as wealthy as one believed, whether Miss —— was really beautiful or only fascinating. To her horror she found that, for want of other diversion, she was beginning to take an interest, however slight, in these trivial affairs. Of course, as soon as she realized this interest, it departed, and she was left in a state of irritation.

“Life” was her cry as surely as Honor’s was “Freedom.”

The next day at about one o’clock, when she had returned from her morning’s walk with her aunt, she was told that Solterre wished to speak to her in the library.

Without a word, upon her entry, he proffered her a note, smiling with an air of mystery and amusement.

The handwriting on the envelope was strange to her: it was sloping forward and written with a fine pen. She looked up at Solterre quickly.

“Who from?”

“Read,” he said, and she obeyed him.

“DEAR LADY CHRISTYN,” she read, “You may think this the most amazing piece of impertinence, as indeed it would be, were it written in any but the spirit that it is. I only wish to tell you that in the last few months you have raised my value, in my own eyes, to an unprecedented extent. I must be irresistible. I must be delightfully wicked. I must be • fascinating. In short, I must at last have achieved all the things I have been dreaming over since my childhood, that you should not be allowed to meet me.

“But when Fate jests, dear Bee-princess, it never

fails to sting as well. You are sheltered and protected as befits a future queen-bee, and I may not see you. You seem to me like the fairest apple in an Eden I may never enter, and my visionary appetite has been unmercifully whetted, only to leave me hungrier than before, and throwing me solely back to my imagination, which is blurred in its feverish desire to conjure up your face, a face not even aided by a photograph.

"Well, perhaps some day I shall set eyes on you when you do not guess it, because set eyes on you I must. Only valuable jewels are so guarded.—Your obedient and humble servant,

"GEORGE NEILSON."

Christyn smiled wryly. "'Bee-princess,'" she mused, "and 'fairest apple in an Eden I may never enter'!" Then she said: "Am I sentimental, or did he really get a note of pathos into that letter? He is essentially clever, and I should like to meet him too!"

She pouted a little, and then scribbled a reply:

"Thank you, Mr. Neilson, for your letter which was really worthy, in its poetry, of the illustrious name you bear. I assure you I have wept copiously over the misfortune of being forbidden to meet you. 'You are so interesting,' saith the flapper . . . and you must remember that I am still a flapper.

"CHRISTYN DE SOLTERRE."

At last here was something which savoured of romance. Something adventurous. She thanked Solterre for playing go-between, and begged him to say nothing about the letters to anyone, to which he

agreed with a sad smile. Sweet-silly-Christyn, who never saw malice!

The next morning she walked in Hyde Park with her aunt, and met George Neilson face to face near the Achilles statue. She smiled, remembering the toy-shop episode, but the smile was purely one of reminiscence, and was not meant for him at all. His expression was merely that of the blankest amazement. He stared at her almost rudely, with dropped jaw and starting eyes. Then his face suddenly lit with the most encouraging smile, and he bowed low to the older woman, who nodded stiffly to him, and strode on.

"Oh, Auntie," cried Christyn, "you bowed to him! Who is he?"

The lady's mouth contracted into an even thinner line than usual. She hesitated before replying.

"Oh, what is his name, Aunt Amelia? He looked rather nice."

"Did you find him nice?" Aunt Amelia answered hurriedly. "He is not my favourite of Francis's friends. Rather a—er—fast young man, you know, and too good-looking."

Already Christyn's instinct warned her of the stranger's identity. Her aunt's embarrassment enhanced it. She tried hard to keep the eagerness from her voice.

"What is his name? Do tell me! I am sure I know him by sight."

"Do you? Francis is absurdly devoted to him. His name is Neilson."

"Ah, so it is Neilson, the poet?"

"Er—ah—yes. You have not read his verses, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, some of them. He is rather a cynic—Francis gave me some of his books to read."

"How very unnecessary of Francis! Especially after your father's express objections! However, we will say nothing to your father about it."

"I should so love to meet Neilson," Christyn declared dreamily. "I am sure he has something to say worth hearing."

"My dear child!" The old lady was quite horrified. "It is only forbidden fruit which tempts you. He is a most pernicious young man with his witticisms and paradoxes."

Christyn said no more. That the young man of the toy-shop and Neilson were one and the same, had given her a pleasant shock, and (Honor would have been delighted to note) also made her long to talk to him. At the moment she felt quite strangely excited about the coincidence, and determined to enlist the sympathies of Solterre. Now she must certainly meet him. Oh, yes, *now*. . . .

The following morning Solterre visited Neilson at about noon, and found his friend in the act of shaving. Neilson, brandishing a razor, ran to the door to meet him.

"Sol!" he cried. "Your Bee-princess is charming! I have seen her. It was she whom I saw in the winter after all! She is even adventurous! She is beautiful and the image of her mother! She is subtle! She is adorable! I must speak to her. I shall lie in wait for her in front of your house until I get a chance. Eleanor again, without Eleanor's evident foolishness!"

"Neilson, you damned fool!" exclaimed Solterre with a smile. "You know you can't meet her that way. Pretty kid, isn't she? Racy too."

"No," said Neilson, "not pretty at all. Much too severe a type to be 'pretty.' Eyes like fire, and set

in her face with a ruler. Mouth like a pink camellia—made of wax! ” He kissed his hand and waved it over his head. “ Bah! I’m a materialist, Sol, but I don’t think it’s only her fire-eyes and wax mouth that attract! Tell me, she is clever, isn’t she? She has a voice, I know! ”

“ She may acquire the gift of conversation too, if she grows up in the right surroundings, and develops properly. She dances like an angel. Of course she’s still an absolute kid, but I adore her. So you are quite conquered? Don’t you bless me for telling you that she walks by the Achilles statue at half-past twelve? ” It was delightful to see what pride Solterre took in Christyn.

“ Yes, yes, I bless you. Do you know I have seen her exactly three times before yesterday, without knowing for certain that she was your cousin? In the winter she used to stand punctually at five o’clock every afternoon before a certain toy-shop in the Brompton Road, and she reminded me so of Eleanor that I used to go there especially to watch her. I even spoke to her once—on the very day you mentioned her to me for the first time. I never saw her again after that. I wonder whether she remembers why my face is familiar to her? ”

Neilson scribbled another note and handed it to Solterre for Christyn. Solterre was really entertained by this entirely charming intrigue. He hurried home.

When Christyn read the note she laughed nervously.

“ So you are the Bee-princess! And we are only old friends then, who have been parted! In that case it is imperative that I, at least, break the unwritten

law and approach you. I beg that the rebuff etiquette demands that you should give me, may not be too hard."

Christyn took Solterre by the lapels of his coat and faced him squarely.

"Francis," she said, and she breathed deeply from the excitement, "I am not going to the Shaftesbury Theatre with you this afternoon at all!"

"No? Where are you going?" he asked, smiling a little at her outburst. This spelt fun.

"You are going to take me to a party in St. John's Wood."

"Never! You are mad!"

"I am going to visit John Parnell, Francis."

"John Parnell and a half! You mean you want to meet Neilson. I can't."

"Very well then. I shall go with Honor. You have been enjoying yourself, making us both curious to see each other, and have played back-hand go-between. Now that it comes to open behaviour, you haven't the courage to go on with it. I am tired of being left out of everything, and of being treated like a curiosity, and I have a right to choose my own friends. I am not a child, and my father hasn't really the power to forbid my meeting Neilson at all. Until to-day I obeyed him out of sheer lack of interest—now it's different. If it was his earnest desire that I shouldn't meet Neilson, he ought to have used tact, and not flaunted his authority in my face from the first moment. He can hardly expect me to consider his word final nowadays. After all, 'we live in the twentieth century' as your beloved says."

"Christyn!" Solterre suddenly wondered whether this business was not a trifle dangerous.

"I beg your pardon if I have been coarse, Francis. But why do you consider Honor entitled to far greater freedom than I am? Why is all well with her because she is modern?" Christyn was slowly getting angry.

Solterre grew afraid. "Christyn, for God's sake stay old-fashioned! I don't care what becomes of Honor at all in that way. Surely you realize . . . Christyn! You are a Solterre . . . you mean a lot to me!" Oh, no, he must not lose her, he mustn't let her spoil herself, change.

"Oh, do I? 'Stay old-fashioned.' Yes, that would just about suit you!" Christyn stormed all at once. "Men prefer door-mats—they are easier to walk on. I'm tired, tired, tired to death of all this obedience and hypocrisy! I've been pretending to be good for months. I'm not sweet *or* good. I'm a devil, only I don't wear my soul on my sleeve!"

Solterre took both her hands gently, and looked into her eyes. This was going to be difficult. So she had a temper, this sweet, shy little girl.

"You promise not to fall in love with him?" he asked.

Christyn raised her head with conscious proudness and drew away her hands. She was quite angry now. Oh yes, she had a temper.

"Do you think I am such an obvious flapper that I am going to lose my head completely over the first popular matinée idol I meet?"

"He is fearfully handsome. His face grows on you."

"Do you think me so shallow? Thanks."

"He is witty and fascinating. He can talk you over in five minutes."

"I now discover your opinion of me." She

stamped her foot. "Do you think," she burst out, "that because he is attractive I must love him? The man I shall love must be lovable. There is nothing darling and lovable about Neilson."

"Christyn, I only say this because if what I am going to do is ever the cause of either of you being unhappy, I shall never forgive myself. Somehow I feel as if I were entirely responsible for you. I am proud of you. I cannot help it, but you seem to belong to me a little. Forgive me." Now it was he who spoke with unusual tenseness.

"Francis, you are very good to me." Christyn was chastened.

"I could not bear you to fall in love with Neilson!" he exclaimed suddenly. And then without more ado he took her into his arms and kissed her.

She was quite certain now that she loved him because she allowed him to kiss her.

That afternoon he drove her to No. 16 under the pretext of taking her to a theatre and of fetching Honor on the way.

CHAPTER V

STUDIO TEA

JOHN PARNELL is playing the piano; that is to say, he is rippling off chords and arpeggi with that vague, dreamy stare in his eyes and the benevolent smile on his mouth. Neilson, Phillipa and Honor are trying to shout each other down in some argument or other, and Neilson is thinking that if Phillipa smokes any more cigarettes she will be sick. Watching them in silence is a Russian sculptor with a broken nose (a friend of Parnell's). Honor is carried away by her own eloquence and is standing before the fireplace, one foot on the fender, and the leather of her dainty, eccentrically-shaped shoe is beginning to send up the smell of scorching. She is gesticulating in a manner which would suggest to an onlooker that she is the Southerner rather than Phillipa, who is reclining languidly in an armchair. Neilson, with one hand in his pocket, is laughing at the fight which goes on between the two girls, and usually makes his remarks when both of them are already talking at the same time. The Russian sculptor keeps a dignified and rather contemptuous silence.

Gabriel is pouring out tea, assisted by one of the young ladies who came with Honor, and by Phillipa's chaperone. The other girl is hovering around Parnell, smoking in a very quick and amateurish way.

The whole atmosphere is excessively noisy and

smoky, but the inmates of the studio seem to be enjoying themselves in spite of it. Is it not necessary to enjoy oneself at a studio tea? And is it not one's duty to be at one's most brilliant there?

Terry flings open the door, and in his best butler-manner announces: "Mr. James Drayton and Miss Aline St. John!"

Enter Mr. Drayton, who is very fair and nervous, and who has a thin nose, an overhanging upper lip and frightened eyes; and Miss Aline St. John, whose hair is chemically golden, who can boast brick-coloured cheeks and tomato-coloured lips, and who appears to suffer from chronic sleepiness.

No one is ever introduced at the studio, so why should an exception to this rule be made to-day? Mr. Drayton walks up to Neilson, and exclaims in an agitated manner:

"My dear chap! I did not realize you had so many . . . friends in to-day! I just dropped in with the Sparrow to see how you were . . . I hope, er . . . !" he laughs feebly.

"I'm so glad to see you, Drayton!" says Neilson, shaking him warmly by the hand to give him confidence. "How is Gaby's portrait getting on? I haven't seen it yet, you know!"

Drayton glances around him furtively, and notices the presence of the Russian sculptor, who frightens him.

Neilson turns to Miss St. John: "Well, Sparrow, and how is the world treating you?"

The Sparrow languidly gives him her left hand and looks at him through scarcely-raised, heavily-waxed lashes: "Oh, one can never do what one most wants to!"

"Oh, yes! what one *most* wants, one has to do—

or burst! It is only what one *rather* wants that doesn't seem worth the pains of getting, and so one leaves it!"

"You are annoying, Neilson!" she drawls back. "You immediately take up a remark and make an argument of it. One may not even make remarks in this place without getting it in the neck."

Neilson laughs at this, and taking her by the arm, leads her over to John Parnell.

"How do you do, Sparrow?" says Parnell, throwing back his head and grinning, but without taking his hands off the keyboard.

"Oh, so-so," she replies, and sits down at his feet on the dais on which stands the piano.

"Still discontented?" he asks, with a twinkle in his eye.

"You are tactless, John Parnell! But tell me about yourself!" she says without enthusiasm.

"For God's sake, don't!" shouts Honor from the fireside, "she'll get so absent-minded!"

The Sparrow laughs good-naturedly. "P'raps you're right!" she murmurs. "Nothing interests anyone but his own affairs really."

"Pshaw!" whispers Honor with disgust to Phillipa Martinez, "have you ever heard such a weak imitation of Neilson in your life? What a platitude—ye gods!"

Phillipa smiles. "Oh, perhaps she loves the Neilson ver' much, and try to be like heem! Poor-r thing!"

The silent Russian speaks. "I think you are even more unkind to her than Miss Pembroke. It is very terrible to be called a 'poor thing.' Of course she admires Neilson, but she need not draw verbal caricatures of him."

"Won't someone help me?" cries Gabriel desperately from among the teacups. "I have managed to inundate four saucers, but have not yet succeeded in pouring a cup of tea for anyone!"

The Russian shrugs his shoulders and saunters over to him.

"I hate pouring tea!" says the Sparrow, and does not move.

"I am not a 'hausfrau'!" informs Phillipa, puffing at her cigarette, and raising her hand above her head to watch the blood drain from it (a typical position).

"I'm an awful fool at it!" giggles the girl standing beside Gabriel.

"I am not going to pour out tea with five girls in the room!" says Neilson with decision, and one can see the contempt in his face.

"Let me try!" murmurs the chaperone, waving her hands helplessly.

"I vote that everyone pours out his or her own!" exclaims the other girl brightly.

A chorus of "Oh, yes! much more fun!" greets this suggestion, and there is a general rush to the tea-table. Neilson nods, but smiles curiously.

All excepting Phillipa are now beside Gabriel, and chatter and laugh and push. Neilson stands up beside Phillipa and gazes into her upturned eyes. She rises and stretches herself like a lazy animal to all her five feet of height. Her face, both in feature and expression, reminds him strongly of the Gioconda, for she possesses the long thin upper lip and the full crimson lower one, and when she smiles her white, pointed, even teeth barely show. Neilson stares at her plump, pretty hand. She smiles and nods.

"It is pretty, no?" she exclaims, holding it up.

"Most disturbingly!" he replies, and because no one is looking, and at least she is true to her own type, he catches hold of it.

The door is suddenly and violently flung open, and a much startled Terry cries out: "Lady Christyn de Solterre and the Viscount de Solterre!"

"What a sound sense of the theatre we have!" says Neilson coolly. "Thrilling moment in Act II!"

Phillipa raises her left eyebrow, and a peal of laughter breaks from her. Honor first looks scandalized, then catches her breath with an air of triumph, while the usually imperturbable Parnell jumps up and exclaims: "My God! What on earth is she doing here?" Gabriel breaks a teacup promptly.

"Lady Christyn!" cries Parnell, genuinely distressed. "Why are you here?"

"Hullo, child!" says Honor, walking up to the newcomer, in a manner suggesting that now she is here, she ought to make the best of it.

Solterre greets everyone present, while Christyn pulls off her sealskin coat and, with a smile, throws it over the astonished Terry's arm.

"Isn't it monstrous windy?" says Gabriel, only to put in a word. "You are most courageous."

Christyn laughs shortly. "Do you think I have disobeyed my father and braved you all to discuss the weather—with Mr. Neilson? Where is he?"

She walks boldly forward, but, catching sight of Phillipa, turns a little pale, and stops short.

"Ah!" she exclaims, drawing in her breath, "I see I have fallen among old friends!"

"I see it is turning into a children's party!" remarks Phillipa insolently.

Then Christyn stood alone, in the middle of the

room, and faced the whole company. The Girl with the Black Plaits was there, and quite suddenly she prayed wordlessly, vaguely for some protector. The Girl with the Black Plaits, said Christyn to herself, was her arch-enemy; she was the evil genius of her life; why must she be here, also? A sigh of sheer disappointment came from her. She stretched out her hand, as if in the dark, to catch hold of Solterre; but it was Neilson's arm she touched, for Solterre was at the other end of the room, conversing with the Sparrow, and Neilson had silently approached her in the meantime. She dropped his arm immediately and turned to face him, holding out her hand.

"How do you do?" she said. "We have seen each other before."

"So this is you, at last," he replied, "and now I know I have seen you before—before we met in the Park the other day. Do *you* remember where it was . . . ?"

"Perhaps in front of a toy-shop!" put in Phillipa flippantly. "Christyn has always had a habit of standing, unchaperoned, before the well-known toy-shops of the different cities of the world!"

Neilson stared again, and then shrugged his shoulders.

Christyn's lips curled. "She is a poor thing!" she said, with a glance in Phillipa's direction. "Perhaps she loves you very much!"

Honor's eyes sparkled with mischief. Phillipa's cheeks reddened painfully, but she only replied coolly:

"How novel it feels to be peetied! It has not happen befor-re!"

"It need not necessarily happen again!" said

Christyn, and turned on her heel towards the table.

("The Panther and the Cat!" thought Neilson, amused. "Clever dialogue in this play!")

"Ah! you have had tea," Christyn remarked, and sat down beside Parnell.

"No, we haven't," said Parnell quickly, "because no one wants to pour!"

Christyn's eyes travelled to the dirty cups and saucers, and from them to the face of Gabriel. She offered to pour.

"For Heaven's sake do!" Gabriel begged weakly. "They want to do their own, but have only managed to spill a whole pot of tea on the floor. Terry is coming with some more in a minute."

Christyn began swilling out the soiled cups and saucers in a most business-like manner. When she had filled the slop-basin, she poured its contents over the coal-scuttle, to the distress of Parnell and the Sparrow.

"Wet coal burns beautifully," she stated with assurance. Then: "Please, Terry, I shall want some more hot water. Mr. Parnell, please be nice and give that to Honor Pembroke—this is for you, Miss?—St. John. Oh, yes!—here is a cup for *la belle* Phillipa; will you bring it to her, Mr. Gaby?"

Gabriel whispered to her: "There aren't enough cups to go round! Please don't give me any, or Neilson or Parnell!"

Christyn shook her head, and took Terry aside. "I want all the coffee cups, please," she told him, with a cinema-heroine smile that she hoped would captivate him on the spot. "I'm so sorry to order you about like this, but you must be my confederate, you know, and help me!"

Oh, but there were no coffee cups left. They had already used them all. Christyn still had much to learn about the true Bohemian mode of living.

Neilson sauntered up to her. He studied her completely : she knew how to dress herself. A small ostrich-feathered cap was rather perched on her head ; her dress consisted of a short black velvet coat, cut like a riding habit, trimmed with severely starched collar and cuffs ; she wore a pleated, soft black and grey silk skirt. That she was still in mourning was obvious.

He was amused at the business-like and motherly way in which she looked after them all.

"There, Genius," she said, and held out a coffee cup full of tea to him, "here is your tea. Now go and offer this excellent cake to your guests."

"But I want to talk to you!" he replied smoothly. "They will help themselves. I did not realize that you were domesticated. I thought you were ornamental and artistic. Also, I see you are not a typical representative of the Modern Girl, who is at present receiving so much publicity in the daily Press."

"That, I dare say, is a compliment, so thank you. No, I am not modern. No." She looked about her. "I let the other girls be modern. I let them sacrifice their hair and their frills, and all that is dear to women. And then I walk—in a rustling petticoat—over the bodies of their prostrate womanhood, taking entirely for granted Rights for which they have given all their precious charm. I have no courage. Theoretically I am emancipated; in behaviour, absurdly Victorian. Theoretically I am artistic; in point of fact I am domesticated. One can be all these things so easily."

Neilson enjoyed her. He said: "Very few can. Domesticated and artistic so seldom go together."

"But artistic women love nice houses, you know, and ugly houses are inartistic. There is nothing so jarring to an artistic woman as a badly-run house."

She once more concentrated on the tea-table.

"Some more tea, Mr. Parnell?"

"I do not agree at all," Neilson argued, watching her fingers while she handled the cups and saucers. "I have known women who were artists and whose homes were like kennels. Besides, a domesticated person is always unselfish, and there is no one as selfish and self-centred as an artist!"

"Hullo," said Solterre, joining them. "How are the two geniuses getting on?"

"I am not a genius," replied Christyn flippantly. "Ask Mr. Neilson. According to him it is impossible for me to be artistic because I am domesticated."

"That is not fair, Bee-princess, and I seem to have offended you already! I merely said the combination was a rare one—which remark was intended to be complimentary, by the way."

Christyn shook her head. "I maintain that an artist, like a leader, must first of all command respect and attention. A woman who can, with equanimity, watch a tea being bungled without trying to help, possesses the same mentality as the artist who allows a work to be spoiled without attempting to prevent it. It is the desire of preserving beauty which is prevalent in both the artistic woman and in one whose house is well kept."

Solterre thought Christyn was showing off admirably.

"And where does the ornamental one come in?" he asked.

She answered: "An ornamental woman who is not artistic is nil. An artistic woman who is not ornamental is nil. An ornamental woman who is not a good hostess is nil. A domesticated woman who is not ornamental will not be a good hostess—she is nil and had best remain in the kitchen."

"True to your sex," laughed Solterre, "you are quite clever, but miss the point altogether."

"You are a pedant," said Neilson to his friend. "What does it matter whether she missed the exact point if she has given us something more brilliant? That, my friend, is the art of conversation. To modulate almost imperceptibly into the next key, as in music."

Solterre pretended to look disgusted. "You are as bad as Christyn," he said, "and quite as womanly. I always told you your point of view was effeminate."

"I am the son of a woman. You are a bore, Solterre, with your desire to belong unmistakably to one sex. You appear to have no knowledge of modern psychology, or you would realize that every man has a percentage of woman in him if he is worth cultivating at all. You miss half the joys of life. You seem afraid that women may teach you something, because you think it may rob your sex of some of its glory, and you of some of your maleness!"

"Amen," said Christyn solemnly, "and now, Solterre, having been properly ticked off, tuck your tail between your legs, and walk off to a corner and hold your tongue!"

"Why so chivalrous suddenly?" Solterre asked of Neilson. "Traitor!"

"Perhaps——" began Christyn.

The sudden sound of Parnell's piano made her stop short. She looked at Solterre and hesitated, then gave an odd laugh that made Solterre look up in surprise. She flew to Parnell's side, leant over him whispering excitedly. Solterre wondered what had happened. Neilson stood by expectantly, speculating upon what she was going to do. She had from one moment to another become quite electric.

What occurred next was a thing for which Christyn could never afterwards account. If it had cost her her life, she would not have been able to stop herself at the time. Three bars of a Brahms rhapsody and she was twirling madly, in her stockinged feet, her hat flung into a corner far away. Dancing as if she were letting loose the pent-up wildness and fire of all her suppressed childhood. On and on! Now a wonderful leap; three wild twirls; laughter; a bend forward; a cat-like undulation; mad, mad!

There had been no time in which to warn her, to hold her back, and to remind her that she was fast losing every shred of the dignity she so valued. Solterre bit his lips and exclaimed: "Christyn!" while the rest laughed encouragement. Neilson clapped time and yelled to her to dance on.

"Buzz away, Bee-princess!" he cried, showing his teeth, "faster, faster!"

She sprang over a vase of flowers, and seizing a tulip, flung it in his face.

There were almost tears of anger in Solterre's eyes; he set his jaw, and catching Honor's arm, whispered fiercely: "She is behaving like . . . like a . . . a . . ."

"Hush!" cried Honor, laughing, "don't, Sol! Don't take it like that!"

"It is Neilson's d—— effect on all women and girls! She's drunk!"

Now Christyn's hair came uncoiled and fell about her shoulders. She tore out the remaining hairpins and continued the bacchanal.

Two whole minutes and she was still dancing, but already gasping. Solterre cautioned her, begged her to stop. Upon her utter indifference to him he turned his back upon the entire company, placing his foot on the fender of the fireplace, pale with fury.

It was soon impossible for Christyn to continue dancing. She was, so it appeared to Solterre, entirely hysterical, and it was no longer a dance, but crazy staggering. Neilson, who was laughing somewhat wildly himself, still urged her.

A few seconds later, dishevelled, laughing, crying, painfully gasping, she threw herself on her knees beside Neilson. "I am insane," she ejaculated, "and I can't stand up any more!"

Parnell, however, did not stop playing, and Neilson, with a fiendish sound of mirth, seized her and lifted her bodily on to the table.

"I cannot!" she cried. "I am too dizzy! I shall fall!"

The silly little fool! The innocent, stupid little idiot! Solterre ground his teeth.

She fell forward into Neilson's outstretched arms. He carried her across the entire room to a sofa; but the expression of his face had changed. As he held her, he could feel, and almost hear, the beating of her heart, which made him think of a bird which he had once caught when it had dared too far. Subconsciously he was glad the room was so wide, and consciousness of her head, limp on his shoulder, gave him a sudden, curious thrill.

"You are as light as a feather!" he whispered, "—an eagle's feather, because it has been so high. You are made of fire and snow."

To himself he thought: "She was considered too pure to breathe the same air as I, and now the child lies utterly helpless in my arms! Why is it?" And after he had placed her, exhausted as she was, upon the sofa, he told himself: "It is because she has no protector. In her life there are only men and women who will self-righteously forbid her things, and when she fights free, they stand still and gnash their teeth; but they have not the energy to run after her and carry her back. If Solterre were what he ought to be, he should have torn her from my arms just now, and taken her home. Or better, if he objected so strongly, he should have forced her to stop dancing at once. But he stood still and swore—and later he is going to sulk with her, poor child."

And now Neilson hated himself because Christyn had danced. He wished he had not stood her on the table, even though she was Barthone's daughter.

As for Solterre, he was behaving as though his cousin and all she did were no concern of his whatever. He had begun a conversation with Drayton and Phillipa and the Duenna, while Honor was with the group that stood about Christyn. He felt he could not look at her or Neilson.

Christyn had lain with her eyes closed until this moment. But now she opened them wide and stared at everyone. She immediately noticed Solterre's absence from the group near her.

"Francis," she panted under her breath. "Where is Francis?"

"He's here, you monstrous child!" Honor re-

assured her brightly. "Do keep quiet a minute and get your breath!"

"Francis!" called Christyn.

Solterre slowly sauntered to her side. "Well?" he asked coldly.

She caught his hand and pulled him down to her in order to whisper to him.

"Don't, don't be angry, Francis, please," she pleaded. "I have enjoyed it so! You mustn't spoil my pleasure by grudging me this moment!"

He allowed her to hold his hand, but stood up stiffly.

"We'll have to leave now!" he answered, but he was recovering his good temper again. "You had better do your hair and get ready."

Neilson was angry, but there was a side-smile on his face.

"That's right, Sol," he said. "Forgive her like a generous gentleman. Take her by the hand and show how her sins are for ever forgotten!"

"Trying to be funny?" asked the Sparrow, blinking. "She did nothing wrong."

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Neilson savagely, turning to Parnell. "Why do I have such unintelligent rabble here? 'Did nothing wrong'!" He turned on his heel. "Oh, yes!" he sneered, "she committed the fearful sin of being natural for five minutes! For daring to show us she was a creature of flesh and blood as well as the daughter of a House! Sin? It was unforgivable!"

"Cheese it, Neilson," warned Parnell.

"Of course you love any type of moral nakedness—or you wouldn't be just Neilson!" said Solterre, laying a hand on his arm. Then: "I knew," he whispered, "I guessed."

Christyn stumbled to her feet ashamedly and faced Solterre. "I *have* been undignified, I know," she murmured contritely. But suddenly, as if she felt she were giving him too much power over her, she added with unexpected childish fierceness: "I feel as if I had thrown the Nelson column off my chest! Don't be so proper, Francis!"

"You are an immense baby!" expostulated Neilson. "As I said before, Fire and Snow! You deceive everyone with your appearance of exceeding your age! You are ridiculous—a child! Take her home, Solterre."

He turned abruptly and walked away from the group.

Solterre obeyed him. Christyn tidied her hair, and she and Neilson bade each other an embarrassed adieu. Within ten minutes Solterre and Christyn were speeding back to Brook Street.

"I do not want this afternoon discussed," Neilson said nervously to the remaining guests when the Solterres had left. "If you consider yourselves at all my friends, I beg you to leave me."

Gloomily, as if after some fearful crisis, the Sparrow and Drayton shook him by the hand and departed. Poor Neilson had one of his Byronic moods to-day. The imperturbable Russian took his leave with a knowledgeable smile, and Neilson detested him. Phillipa Martinez had looked on without a word and was now left smoking the last of her seventh cigarette. She had not said one word since Christyn's dance. That wonderful Duenna was helping Terry—in the kitchen.

After John Parnell and Gabriel had left the studio, Phillipa rose, and flinging the cigarette-end into the fire, walked over to Neilson and stood before him.

There was complete silence, and the effect was exactly what she had intended it to be.

"You are depr-essed," she cooed softly. "My beeg friend is unh-happy!"

"So that is Christyn de Solterre," he mused.

"Do not think of her!" Phillipa cajoled. "She is snow—so cold and pure and har-rd. And she is cr-ruel like a child. But I—look at me! I am the warm fire! I am not a child! You must let me comfor-rt you."

Neilson smiled because he was infatuated. But this, this was a film-vamp, for sure. . . .

Neilson. So perverse—so very perverse!

So perverse because he was folding Phillipa Martinez in his arms.

Neilson, you are impossible!

CHAPTER VI

THE MENAGERIE : A DIGRESSION

THE sunny month of May, one Wednesday, just at noon.

St. John's Wood is lovely on a fine Spring day : the streets are alive, and the blossoming trees and bushes add glorious splashes of colour to the generally drab appearance of the artists' quarters.

George Neilson is seated at his desk before the window of his room, with a nice, clean piece of paper before him, and a fantastic quill between his fingers. A bright blue silk handkerchief is tied around his head, and he wears a white silk shirt, open at the throat, and grey flannel trousers, his stockingless feet thrust into red morocco slippers. He is going to write a novel.

He feels he must write something immediately because he is so choked with things, but there are, as yet, no definite phrases formed in his brain to write.

Ye gods ! How can one write ? In the next room Parnell is practising. In the kitchen Terry is labouring out some sentimental Irish love-song ; from the window across the road come sounds of a groaning violoncello ; and from further down the street the mingled melodies of a distressed soprano and a barrel-organ.

Neilson wonders vaguely which of all these talented individuals disturb him most. Parnell is all right, but oh ! Terry !

"Terry!" he roars, "for God's sake sing later on!" . . . but with no result. Then he begins to laugh.

Finally inspiration comes, and his pen begins to move.

"Hee-haw" warn unoiled hinges of the gate, and a female figure stands in front of the door before Neilson can look up to see who it is. In a second the bell rings, and Terry, momentarily interrupting his aria, lets in the newcomer, who knocks at Neilson's door and then marches in.

Neilson turns round, jumps up, and says: "Hullo, Avril!" in surprised tones.

"How-do-you-do!" she replies, and then sits down and waits. She is exceedingly pretty and plump, much painted, and short-sighted. She is wrapped in expensive furs and drenched in scent, and is a professional dancer in a well-known revue.

"How goes 'Round the Isle'?" asks Neilson, by way of conversation.

"Very well, thank you!" she says, and then silence again.

Neilson tries two or three topics with equal success. She is sweet and polite, and as stupid as an owl. Indeed, she reminds one very strongly of an owl with her large, round, short-sighted eyes, and her brown furs.

After a period of twenty minutes' embarrassed silence she leaves. When she has gone, Parnell pokes his head in at the door:

"Who was it? I ought to be going to Christyn de Solterre's in a minute for a lesson. Who was it?"

"The Owl. She dropped in, I gathered, before going to Drayton's to be painted."

"Painted enough already, isn't she?" puts in Parnell sheepishly, with a grin.

"Silly old idiot!" returns Neilson. "Making puns at your age!"

"The Owl never attracted me," muses Parnell, "she is so stupid and lifeless and hasn't a word to say. I never could understand you about that girl! You who exist on personality!"

"I didn't go to the Owl for personality. Frankly, I found rest from exertion with her. She is so podgy and comforting, and she uses nice scents, and she has dimpled shoulders and lovely arms. One doesn't have to be clever with her—I remember one summer at Maidenhead——"

"Good-bye!" announces Parnell, and pops out of the door again.

"Squeamish!" remarks Neilson to himself, and then tries to go on working. Parnell ought to be seeing Christyn de Solterre soon, ought he? Who cares? Who is Christyn de Solterre, after all? He picks up his pen again, but all inspiration has fled now.

"Oh, damn!" he sighs wearily, and stretches himself.

Now the barrel-organ stops before his door. It is a weekly joy, this barrel-organ, and its grinder is an old Italian woman, who is a great friend of Neilson's.

"*Buon giorno!*" she cries, and rattles on incomprehensibly in a dialect of her own tongue, her sentences punctuated with kissings of the hand.

He responds with the magnificent sum of one shilling, and returns her salutation. Her repertoire consists of the "Marseillaise," the "Miserere" from "Il Trovatore," an old waltz, and a ragtime; and when she has played them all twice, she screams fare-

well and, to Neilson's relief this morning, trundles away round the corner.

But there is to be no peace for Neilson. The front door again. Parnell gone to Christyn's probably.

Oh no, not yet. Of all women, who should it be but that pretty, superficial young widow whom he has nicknamed so appropriately "The Squirrel"!

Well, enter the Squirrel, who is small, well-groomed and thirty. With her Neilson finds no difficulty in conversation. But unfortunately he must now play the unaccustomed part of a strong, masterful man, because she had taken it into her head to be clinging and tearful and affectionate. Damn these creatures who cannot discern between pastimes and eternal devotion. After he has told her several times that his only love is his Muse, that mortal women mean nothing to him except in the way of mere friendship, and that her duty lies plainly in the rearing of her infant son, she dries her tears, remains yet an hour, and departs just as the Sparrow (whom we have met before) calls to be taken out to luncheon.

Thus sped Neilson's morning.

"A veritable menagerie!" he grumbled. "First the Owl and the Squirrel, and now the Sparrow!" Then he asked: "Why have you chosen to honour me with your luncheon hour, Sparrow?"

"I haven't got a bean," she drawled, "and I want something to do and someone to talk to!"

"Ye gods! So you choose me? What has become of our friend Drayton?"

"I can't sponge on Drayton any more; he's about as wealthy as I am, and about as hungry. Be a sport, Neilson, and take me to Soho; I'm about starving."

"And I'm about savage at being interrupted all

morning," mimicked Neilson. But for fear of wounding her feelings, he smiled, "Well, come along, Sparrow. But I must be back by three o'clock, as another member of the menagerie is to take a lesson with Parnell."

The Sparrow tossed her head. "How like you to steal Parnell's property. Who is it?"

"The Panther. And if Phillipa Martinez was ever Parnell's, I'll eat the moon!"

The Sparrow whistled, and then remarked: "She's a fast lot, that Panther."

Neilson's eyebrows lifted humorously, and then his lips twitched. "Miauw," he said.

"Oh, no. I am an artist——"

"Oh?"

"Don't be impertinent—I'm Bohemian, then, and on my own, and twenty-six years old, and I'm modern. But the Martinez girl is much younger, and pretends to be heavily chaperoned and old-fashioned, and flirts with you surreptitiously all the time, and is 'in Society,' and quite bad and amusing."

"And 'damn pretty!'"

"All the worse. Come on, let's go."

So they started off, Neilson and the Sparrow, their goal being a very Italian and extremely diminutive restaurant in Soho. The Sparrow chose a table in the corner of the room by the window, on the first floor, just where the sun blazed in at them most inexorably through a soiled pane of glass, making the heat almost unbearable to Neilson. She sat full in the light, so that her reddened lips and the clogged pores of her white nose and chin showed up grotesquely. Neilson watched with fascination the black wax dabs on the tips of her eyelashes while they bobbed up and down as she closed and unclosed her eyelids, without paying

the slightest attention to what she was saying. But suddenly, for no especial reason, a wave of nausea surged up in him and coloured his forehead and ears. The heat. The discomfort angered him; but like a wave it subsided again, and turning to the plump Italian waitress at his side, he ordered the food.

With the coffee they both lit cigarettes, and then the Sparrow, leaning forward with both arms on the table, began to speak:

"Neilson, I want to ask you something—a question."

Neilson frowned.

"Don't frown, boy." She fingered her cigarette nervously, and looked down at the crumbs on the tablecloth. "I want to know if you've really forgotten all that idiocy between us last year, and merely look upon me as a pal?"

In his reply Neilson reverted to a boyish honesty which would have made any of those acquaintances who thought him a cynic, stare with amazement.

"My dear, good Sparrow," he said, in all earnestness, "of course that is entirely buried. I was a bit of a swine, and if you and Drayton are willing to forget, I may only say that, as far as I am concerned, the whole episode could have happened to Gaby—so far away does it seem. I honestly wish to be your very good friend, for you are a dear fellow, Sparrow, and as straight as a die, and I hope that I may never be the cause of any trouble to your peace of mind."

Oh, Neilson, how unkind of you! Poor Sparrow, whose last hopes now crash like so much broken glass around her! The tears well to her eyes, but Neilson, in the conceit of his excellent intentions, believes that they are but tears of grateful tenderness, and grasps her hand beneath the table.

Shortly after this Neilson took leave of the Sparrow in a shop. The poor Sparrow's heart was very heavy, but Neilson's was light with childish satisfaction. He was really glad that he was so well rid of her to-day, for lately he had begun to weary of his friends and surroundings. Without any deliberate desire to be unkind or snobbish, he would have liked to retreat from the entire set of which he was the keystone; he would have liked to move among people who were not Bohemians although artists, and to deny any acquaintance with those women who formed what he called his "menagerie." What was it that had suddenly come over him? Was he blasé? Was it regret? Regret, he told himself, was useless and therefore a bad thing. It was not only useless, but ungrateful—ungrateful to Life which had offered him experiences he had accepted greedily without troubling to discover the price. And now that he knew the price, he would fight shy, would he, like the sinners who turn Christian on their death-beds for fear of some unknown punishment beyond? No, the right thing to do was to bow deeply to Life, and to thank her for experiences already bestowed, and now to have sufficient strength of character to break away from his present mode of living. But how begin the breaking away? And why? Why did he suddenly feel dissatisfied with all that had surrounded him since his eighteenth year? What meant this sudden unquenchable craving for sinlessness, for chastity? For the perfumes of Nature and natural beauty? Why had his aim suddenly changed to something apparently beyond his reach? Gabriel annoyed him; Parnell was a heavy booby; they were both petty and narrow in their pseudo-width of experience—experience which was devoid of all noble fastidiousness. Experience

which savoured only of adventures in dens, and in matters of sex, and never of refinement and combined mental and bodily culture. He was sickened by the women of his acquaintance: all of them were without purity. And the young girls whom he knew were fools. In that moment he blamed his brother and Parnell for the outlook on womanhood they had instilled in him during his boyhood. He had not found an unusual woman, because he had refused to look for one; because he was afraid of his companions and their ridicule, he had tried to quell his impulses to long for one.

His marriage had been dismal, but more terrible still to him was his careless and cynical acceptance of its failure. During those feverish days after the war he had deliberately married a girl whose behaviour gave him ample cause to consider her immoral and merely calculating. But at that time he was only a little over twenty-one, rash, obstinate in his rôle of reformer, and had dreamt grandly of converting the Misguided, the Misunderstood, those who struggled towards Beauty, etc. Fanatically, he sought the most obviously difficult cases. She had seemed to him good-natured and exceedingly pretty in a childish, piquant way, and had appealed to his boyish pity. Anyhow, it was an experiment. She was a year older than he, a runaway from the most unexciting lower middle-class home. Later he discovered that, in her age of innocence, it had always been her ambition to be a famous courtesan, and that she regarded her young husband more as a stepping-stone in her career than as a permanent companion. But too soon there came an annoying and unforeseen obstacle in the path of the inexperienced but vain-glorious Mrs. Neilson. It occurred even before she

had definitely set out to capture any but her already captured and disillusioned spouse. She called herself a fool, but confessed to George Neilson that she was going to have a child. Walking along under the blossoming trees in one of the pretty country-like streets of St. John's Wood on this warm May day, six years later, he remembered with the shame one feels for one's early sentimentalities, the tenderness that had seized him then at the news of his prospective fatherhood, and how in his senseless rapture he had made up his mind to forgive her everything. Her untidiness in their home, her slovenly dress early in the morning, her personal bodily, unbeautiful habits, because she had "got" him; her perpetual supposition that a bottle of scent and a box of powder could replace a bathful of clean water. Hateful he found those memories, memories that he would give anything to efface, because they made him feel soiled, as if such untidy thumb-marks were ineradicable. The scars of Life one could even boast of, but little bruises only made one ashamed because they indicated that one had been ignobly fingered and lewdly mauled by Life.

There had been one last fearful quarrel just after the child's birth. And then he had left them both in the country and went back to live with the artists in the studio once more. After some months he returned, only to find her gone and a letter to say the child was dead. Ah, well! After the divorce he never saw her again, and now . . . well, she lived in Paris, and had at last achieved her ambition: she was the mistress of a French politician.

At the age of twenty-six he had brought out that third volume of verse which definitely assured his reputation as a poet. Through Solterre, ever a staunch friend, and at one time his only link with

non-Bohemians, he once more entered the homes of the now welcoming and admiring friends of his friends. There were certain young ladies who really were friends of his. Honor Pembroke and Phillipa Martinez, with her everlasting and entirely useless chaperone, figured prominently among them. He hoped that Solterre would bring Christyn into the circle.

Alas for that rabble which he could not disown! The "menagerie" of animals in the shape of women. Parnell's and Gabriel's fault, all of them! The Owl did not trouble him because he did not openly acknowledge her acquaintance; the Squirrel's name was quite unsullied, and she was charming. The Sparrow was really a good sort, and not yet disreputable, but merely knowing that she existed oppressed him. What an atmosphere they all created! Somehow it was sordid, and to-day he hated them.

And the men. His own brother Gabriel, John Parnell, James Drayton. Other Bohemian friends of theirs. They fitted ill with his present mood. Degenerate, weak Gaby, and foolish, heavy John. Drayton, the quasi-æsthete, so shy and uncertain of manner and speech, so sickeningly perfumed and powdered. He hated artists. He hated Bohemians. A longing to escape from the studio seized him. A longing to go away somewhere and live tidily, as Solterre always lived. He desired to know what it felt like to be unable to put one's dirty feet up on the sofa, because the silk would spoil: his sofas were not covered with silk.

In this state of mind he entered the squeaky gate that led to the studio, and once inside, flung himself down on the black casement divan, putting up his feet with a sigh half of weariness and half of relief.

John Parnell, who was as usual at the piano, looked up in surprise, and stopped playing.

"Hullo, old boy, what's the matter?"

"Good-day, Parnell. Phillipa not come yet?"

"Nope. Not for a half-hour yet."

"Hurrah," said Neilson languidly, and lying flat on his back, gazed at the ceiling.

"Hurrah?"—incredulously from Parnell.

"Yes, listen"—Neilson became more eager, "listen, John. I hate them all to-day. I don't want that zoo any more—I am tired of them all. I feel—strange. I tell you what I long for—just to look at for a rest. Listen: she must be tallish, lissome, quiet, graceful . . ."

"With blue-black hair, and a black dress that fits like onion skin," inserted Parnell. "Is that it?"

"Shut up, don't interrupt! No, no, you haven't guessed my mood. Listen, she must have light, golden-brown, curling hair, and a pure oval face and rose-coloured lips that are a little frightened and tremble. She must have violet-blue eyes (perhaps a little melancholy) and dark, sweeping lashes that almost hide them, and her skin must be entirely devoid of chemical assistance—I don't think I can even put up with powder to-day."

"A chocolate-box beauty!" chaffed his companion.

"Hush! Listen: I think she does not polish her finger-nails, which are perfect; her hands are lovely and pale, and too thin—I like thin hands."

"Go on," said Parnell, obviously very much interested now. "What a sensationalist you are!"

"Her throat? Like marble. She wears filmy white, I imagine," continued Neilson dreamily, "mm . . . and a small straw hat with a feather. So Victorian. And she has a perfume that is faint and

indefinable—I do not think that it is bottled perfume at all, but a natural aroma—her breath, I dare say. . . .”

“Is she gay?”

“Not at this moment. She knows I want her so, and pities me for wanting her.”

“Ha-ha! What a lily.”

“Oh, damn!” suddenly burst out Neilson. “Is she possible, such a dream-lady?”

“Yes,” replied Parnell, laughing, “very.”

“Bejabers, fancy a *roué* like me drawing visions of a sweet child like that. Is she possible?”

“Indeed,” laughed Parnell, “you have been describing one side of Christyn de Solterre!”

“Have I?” mused Neilson without surprise.

“Yes? Can I achieve Christyn de Solterre?”

“No,” said Parnell, with decision.

Neilson raised one leg and gazed meditatively at his toe.

“Can’t I?” he said softly.

The door bell rang, and Neilson jumped up suddenly.

“Ah, Panther!” he was exclaiming the next minute. “How glad I am to see you!”

CHAPTER VII

THE GIRL WITH THE BLACK PLAITS

THE Duenna settled herself comfortably in a corner of the room, and began to read.

Phillipa began to sing a scale. She possessed one of those pretty uninspiring voices, helped by a true ear, of which there exist a multitude; Parnell referred to them as vocal pianolas. For half an hour she sang, while George Neilson remained in his own room. After that he emerged and listened for a while, and then the lesson was finished. Parnell invited them to stay for tea, and Phillipa and her companion accepted readily.

Parnell was glad the lesson was over. To deal with Christyn and Phillipa on the same day, the one in the morning, the other in the afternoon, was really too much. It rankled, too, having to trot down to Brook Street to give the Solterre girl a lesson, instead of her coming to him as everyone else did, only it was worth it. And she was so sweet, too, so marvellously sweet that Parnell had lost his head at the second meeting and fallen deliciously in love with her. She did not know it, she did not notice it, and she liked him so much. In a very short time they became such friends. There she would stand and chirp and trill like a little bird, so that even scales and exercises entranced him. Sometimes she would make a mistake, place her voice

wrongly, sing a note badly, and then she would grow confused and blush with annoyance and self-impaired vanity, and they would both stop and laugh and begin again. He treated her like a little girl. After that day when she had first visited the studio, he began to give her a pet name of his own. He called her Christina, and spoke dog-Italian to her for fun, because all singing was related to Italy, and he had spent many years of his youth in Italy. Yes, Christina he called her affectionately, and they both ignored Pender who nearly always sat in the room with them. Occasionally it was Aunt Amelia who chaperoned, but they did not allow even Aunt Amelia to disturb them. Christina . . . Once in Italy, thousands of years ago, he had known someone else called Christina. . . .

Phillipa Martinez he detested. She always referred to Christyn as Christina, but there was no affection in the way she said the name. It was tiresome having either to ignore Phillipa's caustic remarks anent Christyn, or to ward them off, or to defend Christyn. Christyn was no saint herself, and that morning had said some biting things about the "Girl with the Black Plaits" and her voice. Panther and Pussy-cat, Phillipa and Christyn. Really too much to deal with for poor simple Parnell in one day! Parnell felt he was getting terribly middle-aged to be "going so soft" about a little flapper like Christyn de Solterre. This morning she had been full of news: in future she would be allowed to go to his studio for her lessons, and he would no longer have to make that ignominious journey from St. John's Wood. She had talked the matter over with Solterre, and between them they had impressed upon Aunt Amelia the indignity of Parnell's present position. Oh, God bless that child! Lord Barthone was not even consulted.

Phillipa sat there now with Neilson beside her, and the Duenna presided over the tea-table. They discussed the last subject in the world Parnell would have chosen. Damn that mischievous Neilson!

"Tell me, Panther," Neilson was saying, "after that unfortunate occurrence here in March, did you ever come across Christyn de Solterre again? It was awkward, wasn't it?"

"Devilish awkward! No, I do not see her again, but it is a peety—we make such splendid enemies! She thinks she has the last wor-rd, but *plon*, I answer, and then I feel I squash her quite, quite. But no! She jump up and give me . . . repartee! We both have a great deal of brains, and our intelligence is *bee*-eautifully balanced. We make glorious enemies!"

Neilson laughed. "Wouldn't it pay better to amalgamate and be friends? Think how powerful you would be! What perfect foils to each other's beauty: you, the 'pocket Venus,' dark, Southern; and she, tall, fair, and Northern! You so gay, she so dignified!"

"Oh, la-la! How or-rdinary, to be friends! Ees much more or-riginal to be great enemies! Women who are friends are so—so dowdy! It is so school-girl to have r-real women friends! We always fought, Christina and I—is it not so, Amica?"—turning to her chaperone, a woman of some forty years of age. It was the first time she had admitted her presence.

The chaperone sighed. "Yes, Christina was often most difficult to manage. She was so haughty and silent, and nothing could move her. I do not think I ever saw her cry, except once, after her mother's death, and I felt really sorry for her then, because I fancied we had always misunderstood her. But

Phillipa was always much more reasonable and much more affectionate, and was never sullen." She patted Phillipa's hand.

"I had never thought of Christyn as undemonstrative," remarked Neilson, "especially after I saw her dance."

"She often let herself go like that," replied the woman, "when one least expected it. She had a passion for dancing, and could not hear pleasing music without wishing to display her talent."

"Amica has been with us for five years," explained Phillipa, "and had charge of us both. But silly Christina made an enemy of her from the first—like she did with me! Amica and I understand each other, no?" She smiled at "Amica." "We make—how you say?—a contr-act! I do just what I like, and Amica is ver-ry tactful and does not be in the way, and I make life ver-ry easy for Amica. See?"

"Quite ingenious," said Neilson, highly amused.

"Chr-ristina was six when papa first met Eleanor, and I was twelve years old. I shall never-re forget the first day we met at a children's party in New York. Christina sat next to me and upset her cup of tea, and I laughed. She cr-ried because I laughed at her, and when later she was put next to me in a little game which had been arranged, she screamed, 'Not beside the girl with the Black Plaits! I don't like the girl with the Black Plaits!'"

"Phillipa always had glorious long hair," elucidated Amica. "She wore it in two braids down her back when she was a child."

"She has always called me the Girl with the Black Plaits since then," continued Phillipa, "and I have always laughed at her. She says I am the devil

and br-ring her bad luck. Perhaps I am. She had some ver-ry funny habits."

Neilson listened attentively. This amused him. "What habits?" he asked.

"The toy-shop habit, for one," replied Phillipa, and Neilson sat upright. "She adored to stand for hours before any toy-shop, in any weather. But her favourite way of doing it was to slip out, when nobody knew, and all alone, stand and look in at the window—the same toy-shop, perhaps, day after day. She was scolded for going out alone, and when she was a little child she was punished, but it did not cure her, and I don't think she will ever lose the habit."

"Her obstinacy was incredible," added the Duenna.

"Indeed," said Neilson.

"As a child she was most unsociable, and always wanted to be alone to read. She read far too much, much more than was good for her. Most unsociable."

"Don't be unkind," remarked Phillipa airily. "You must call it 'love of solitude,' you know."

"In the country she always wanted to go for long walks quite by herself," the Duenna went on, "and used to run away in order to do what she pleased. She used to send everyone frantic with terror at what could have become of her, and then saunter home saying 'she had been for a walk by herself'! Fancy wanting to go for a walk alone!"

"Unbelievable," said Neilson.

This time Parnell spoke: "She has a fine voice," he said diffidently, "and she is jolly good-looking."

"Oh, yes! That is why she is my enemy! There must never be anybody good-looking except me, and nobody must sing except me, and nobody must love anybody but me, or think anybody char-rming but me!"

"Quite," said Neilson.

"Phillipa is so humorous!" said this inimitable chaperone with a smirk.

"Where is Monsieur Gaby to-day?" asked Phillipa, smothering a yawn.

"Talking of Elephants, how is your grandmother?" asked Neilson with perfect seriousness.

Phillipa tossed back her head, and gave a laugh.

"Gaby is hardly an Elephant!"

"Listen," said Neilson, "and I will tell you a story. Three men of different nationalities were asked to write a treatise on the elephant. The Englishman named his treatise, 'The Elephant: its habits and how to catch it.' The Russian named it, 'The Elephant. Does it exist, and why?' The Frenchman wrote, '*L'Eléphant et ses Amours*.'"

"Glorious!" Phillipa cried, clapping her hands.

"And Gaby—*L'éléphant et ses Amours*—is rehearsing to-day."

"*Avec ses Amours*?" inquired Phillipa, raising her left eyebrow.

Neilson chuckled. "You are naughtier than I imagined."

"You have a evil mind. Are not the ladies in the play he rehearses beautiful?"

"No, it's a star cast."

She laughed again. "Poor Gaby. Is it a love story? Must he kees one of them?"

"Yes, but only at the last moment. And she is the worst of the lot!—the leading lady, too. Poor Gaby!"

"Gaby is beset with beauty," said Parnell, "he is surrounded with it."

"So are you!" said Phillipa carelessly. "Between me and Christyn you ought not to grumble. We are

so beautiful," and she raised her arm above her head as usual.

The chaperone glanced at the clock on the mantel-piece which never worked. Then she consulted her own wrist watch.

"Yes, Amica," acquiesced Phillipa, "we must go, I know."

They rose and said "good-bye" to the men.

"We have had such an enjoyable after-noon!" purred Phillipa.

Parnell saw them to the door, which he held open as they walked down the street towards a cab-rank.

"Damned cats," he said, and slammed the door.

Neilson laughed again and put his hands in his pockets.

"Rolling on like that about that poor child! Damn jealous, that's what she is!" Parnell looked genuinely disturbed. "Rotten, slick, black little female!"

"Listen," said Neilson pensively, one foot in the fender, "I want to meet Christyn de Solterre again."

"Christyn is Solterre's!" snapped Parnell suddenly.

Neilson's jaw dropped, and the side-smile twisted his mouth. "Oh," he said softly, "I did not know she was—claimed. But I want to see her again, all the same."

"What do you want with Christyn de Solterre?" asked Parnell, in a very bad temper. "She is not your sort."

That was just too much for Neilson to-day of all days, after his reflections of the afternoon. That she should be Solterre's property he could understand, but that he, Neilson, should be considered outside her sphere altogether, hurt him beyond endurance.

Parnell's lack of tact made him feel like a wild animal. He felt his ears reddening.

"What do you mean by 'not my sort'?"

"She's not to be trifled and flirted with, that's what I mean. The man she falls in love with is the man she marries. She must be to you what she is to me—an acquaintance, no more. She's not our sort."

"Listen." Neilson felt as if someone had caught hold of three hairs on the crown of his head and was pulling them. "Your sort is not my sort, do you understand? You used the word 'our' then. Solterre and Honor and Alban Lodder—they're my sort—but not yours and Gaby's. The menagerie was brought by Gaby, and the Panther I met as your pupil. Sol and Banny pity me, they put up with me because I amuse them. I am a Bohemian, but they know I am not entirely a skunk. Through them and their patronage I have become the centre, the pillar of this place, and you are the hangers-on! That's the whole unvarnished truth!" He wanted to trample, to say anything so long as it hurt.

"Hold on, Neilson," warned Parnell, astonished beyond rage. "You forget that Gabriel Herbert played leads when you stumbled in on us here years ago."

"Played leads! Listen here—he surrounded himself with rotten women, and Solterre would not know him. He may have been famous on the stage, but the friends of his childhood disowned him as his father disowned him. And in order to pacify your consciences, you disowned Class. It takes a darned lot of doing for a man to be disowned by other men. Gaby is a bad egg; and he dragged you down, instead of your dragging him up. And, begad, he has done all he can to drag me with you. He has refuted his

birth and changed his name, because he found he did not have to live up to anything."

Neilson was breathless with anger. He wanted to smash, to destroy, to beat. He felt impotent, snobbish, in the wrong, and it maddened him all the more. Oh, to be out of it all! To be able to go back and begin again. The new beginning would be humble, but it would be chaste and serious and he would not be branded.

For the first time in his life, through Parnell's carelessness, he felt an outcast, and in that lay the bitterness. What he had merely feared, a friend already took for granted.

He turned away from Parnell, ashamed and humiliated. Parnell ought not to pay for the truth like that, when Life was one's own plaything, after all, to treasure or destroy.

"I think you're mad," Parnell said.

"Yes, I think I am." Neilson did not face him.

"You're a worse fool than I ever thought you could be. You're the bloodiest fool I've ever met."

Parnell placed a hand on Neilson's shoulder. Neilson was their charge, his and Gaby's, their little one, the youngest of them.

"You've gone mushy and cheap. Yes, cheap."

Neilson turned to the window and looked out at a pink hawthorn in the small, square plot inside their gate. Why hurt anyone? When punishment was teaching, it had a purpose, but when teaching was impossible, who desired to be so cruel as to punish?

Good old Parnell.

So Neilson turned to him and said: "Consider it all unsaid. It hasn't happened, this quarrel. It wasn't me."

And Neilson thought that was one of the biggest lies he would ever tell,

The next morning Neilson received a business-like looking letter. He opened it, half afraid lest it should be from one of his creditors, but leapt up suddenly when he discovered its writer to be Honor Pembroke.

"You know my mother has taken the West House, near Windsor, for six months," ran part of it, "and the second of June is my birthday. We are having a small house-party over the week-end, and a dance on the night of the first. *Do* come along on the Friday if you possibly can. Banny Lodder, and Sol and—oh, well, lots of delightful people have already accepted."

Neilson chuckled with excitement. Not quite an outcast yet—no, not quite. He would take Honor into his confidence.

CHAPTER VIII

HONOR, SOLTERRE, CHRISTYN

HONOR PEMBROKE, born in the twentieth century, for which she devoutly thanked Providence, was blessed with triumphant beauty. Altogether God had dealt kindly with her, but of course, as usual, the devil must have a look-in too. God gave her beauty, wits, brains, wealth, and a doting father. But where wealth is, tradition maintains that the devil always wants to be too, if possible. So the devil gave her a stupid mother who literally bored her father to death, for he took to drink from boredom, and later died of it. That, of course, was the devil's doing.

Honor Pembroke, being of the spoilable kind, grew up spoiled. Why not? Everyone told her she was beautiful. She heard every day how smooth and fair was her hair, how her eyes were large and brown, with curling lashes—lovely eyes. She knew she was slight and willowy with neat ankles and fine long hands; her skin was like that of a lily. And she was clever; she realized that for all her beauty, without intellect and education she would only be courted and married for her money, so she took the trouble to be brilliantly well-read, taught herself to talk well and give full rein to her sense of humour. She was not lazy, and she admired originality. Having been surrounded by a superabundance of luxury and care from her childhood, she sickened of the life she had been forced to

lead, tired of the company her silly, snobbish mother surrounded her with, and became a veritable revolutionary in all her tastes. She made friends with various Bohemians merely because they were Bohemians. She became interested in social problems of every sort and kind, and regarded all girls of her own upbringing and means as necessary evils to be endured. Her mother fretted over her daughter's exaggerated ideals, scolded and reprimanded, but in vain. She tried reasoning and arguing, she tried pleading and oftenest whining, but Honor only lifted her flower-like head still higher, and let Mrs. Pembroke understand that in this twentieth century, and in the case of an heiress, Freedom was absolutely her right and due.

When the Viscount de Solterre was introduced to her, she was eighteen, and her greatest interest in life was Carlyle. With an air of patronage he discussed Carlyle with her, argued upon political economy in general, upon education and politics. He was a Tory, and she was a rabid Radical. (She would rather have loved a Radical with a title.) Within an hour there was a distinct compromise on both sides.

"I hate nearly all the people I meet in my mother's drawing-room," she had exclaimed, "they are so stupid and narrow-minded. They become fossilized, because they won't see life as it is. One's own class is idiotic."

"Nonsense," Solterre had said, "the lower classes are worse in a different way. I can introduce you to half a dozen really intelligent, alive people of your own standing."

"Well then, you are wonderful. I haven't met an intelligent creature for six months."

"What about the intelligentzia?"

"I don't care for fossils."

"You are fond of the word 'fossil.' You mean you know no prominent young thinkers at all?"

"No," she had replied, "and what do you call a 'thinker'?"

"I will introduce Neilson to you; he is young and alive."

"Ah, where does one meet these people?" she had asked, shrugging her shoulders, but inwardly rather thrilled.

"Neilson and his cousin Alban Lodder are my best friends. Alban thinks quite enough to warrant the adjective 'intelligent.'"

And so the friendship with Solterre and Neilson and Lodder had started.

They visited her in her own home, which was very near Solterre's, and she went to see them at the studio. She went to the studio time after time, and the artists' friends became her friends. Women to whom she would have scorned to bow to in her own drawing-room, became companions to her. Girls like Aline St. John she treated as her equals. Actresses she met, the best ones only, of course, because the three artists hated mediocrity in any form. They were true to their ideals, the artists. The gentlemen they knew were almost old-fashioned in their gallantry. Where find a finer gentleman of leisure than the art-loving, noble Viscount de Solterre? Where find a healthier, less snobbish, well-bred, highly-principled youth than Sir Alban Lodder? A more talented painter than James Drayton? And the very despised Aline St. John? Was she not, after all, a clever artist? Was she not famous for her black and white illustrations of a certain volume of Neilson's poems? At first Honor Pembroke was delighted. But after

considering the question, she was hurt. Phillipa Martinez also frequented the studio, and yet she was only witty and pretty and catty. So she, Honor, was only looked upon as a decoration too! She would never go to the studio any more. Self-consciously she told herself she was only a Society girl.

First Solterre took her in hand; with a smile he asked where her ideas on philanthropy were now? He did not know that she was so modest and retiring, that she did not realize how clever she was. She was clever, and adorned the studio with her brains if nothing else.

Then Neilson scolded her. Few girls possessed her literary discrimination. Even he, Neilson, took her word for it that a book was good or bad. She was versatile and charming, and the feminine counterpart of Solterre—a perfect lady of leisure. Solterre, also, talked well and read much, discussed all things, and did few.

And so Honor was consoled.

For two years Honor and Solterre argued with and bullied each other. Sometimes, to amuse himself, Solterre became gallant and treated her as a woman and not as a boy.

How poor Mrs. Pembroke hated that Solterre boy. My, how she was afraid of him. No, she didn't exactly hate him, chiefly because one mustn't hate a Viscount who might, one hoped, some day become one's son-in-law. But at the same time she was afraid of him for Honor, because he might not become her son-in-law, and in that case, Honor was wasting her time. Wasting her time at that precious studio, imagining she could learn to write, because she talked a great deal of rubbish to effeminate young men. Well, that Neilson man wasn't so bad. Mrs.

Pembroke was enough of a lion-huntress to put up with Neilson. As it was, her drawing-room swarmed with Russian princes and Counts. Here and there an expatriated Hungarian, a stray Serbian, a Monarchist Greek, added variety to the gathering, but in spite of that, Russians prevailed. There was among the company a Russian sculptor with a broken nose whom Honor had met at the studio, who really happened to have been an artist of note in Petrograd before the Revolution. At first Mrs. Pembroke would have none of him, but then Princess Vladimir F——, who so courageously ran a dressmaking establishment, hearing Honor mention his name one day, raised both hands and exclaimed :

“ You don’t tell me that my dear Sergei Semyonovitch is in London ! ” hereby creating an “ open Sesame ” into the house of her American protectress.

The interest that Honor took in the sculptor eventually irritated Solterre, which somewhat raised the hopes of Mrs. Pembroke ; but her hopes were evidently foundationless for, on the other hand, Solterre expressed a distinct approval for the son of a Grand-duke whom he ought to have regarded as a rival.

Honor dreamt vaguely of the handsome Russian prince, and fell decidedly in love with the cynical sculptor. Solterre stood by and smiled. Honor was temporarily ecstatic, morally suspended between the Russian aristocracy and Bohemia, with the possibility of Solterre in the distance like a dim light that might blow out.

When Christyn came, she did not obviously interfere with the intimacy between Honor and Solterre. She was such a dear little girl, and so quaint with her early Victorian ideas on emancipation. She did not

believe in the equality of the sexes, although she did not for a moment consider men her superiors. She was not an "outdoor girl" nor was she accustomed to Society, and she knew no technical language of politics or economics. At the time she used no face creams or powders. There was no fear of competition between her and Honor. Christyn was not half so clever.

But what was the Viscount de Solterre's attitude? Solterre, who was Nature's prodigy, who had never been known to be in love in his life? People speculated on the nature of his attentions to Honor.

Then they centred their interest on the seventeen-year-old Christyn. The inscrutable Solterre behaved towards her exactly as if she had been his sister, not his cousin, and appeared indubitably attached to her.

The fact was that only two people in London understood the truth. They were Neilson and Christyn herself, and they knew that Solterre was the kind of man who was genuinely every woman's brother, even when he himself believed he was not. . . . That much they knew, if nothing more. No, nothing more could be guessed about Solterre as far as women were concerned. His obvious good points were his lawfulness, material generosity, level-headedness, a kind of cautious intelligence, and great physical courage. No one knew whether his heart assented when he nodded his head, or whether he was kind to people because he felt pity for them, or because they interested him. His amazing adaptability caused him to act as a kind of link between the type that was Alban Lodder and the type that was Neilson. He was liked by most men, and generally admired by women, and made his friends or his enemies at a first introduction. Those who liked

him at first sometimes grew tired of him, but those who disliked him never learnt to like him.

If Solterre was reserved, Honor was sometimes more so. But with her, reserve was a cloak for a yearning for romance; her armed, hard humour hid a painful shyness of which her admiration of the woman of the world made her ashamed. She patronized because she was so hopelessly uncertain of herself. Few people knew how her foolish mother got on her nerves, and that her emancipation was due to the fact that Emancipation allowed one to go out alone and leave one's mother at home.

Lately Honor had become harder and more brilliant. She was cleverer and more beautiful and magnetic. Also, she was less happy. She had spent the greater part of her childhood at various boarding-schools "because she was an only child," and she had not even acquired a really intimate friend.

And at the same time Christyn began to awaken; she no longer lay sleepless in the night and wept out of impotence. She began to exult in her aloofness, and prayed to the Deity every night to bless her and those few who were dear to her. Life was not without its compensations: through her glorious loneliness she had acquired independence of spirit, a thing she could never lose. At this period she ventured to suggest to Honor that they had a great deal in common; a feeling of compassion seized her, and she would have liked to gain Honor's confidence. But it seemed to her that Honor drew herself up and stiffened at the indiscretion. Christyn retired as if she had nearly been stung.

However, they continued being friends. They each knew what the other had guessed, but neither spoke. Why should they not remain friends? The same

people liked them, and they liked the same people. They liked each other.

And now came Honor's twenty-first birthday.

(There is a mystery about the Russian sculptor. Solterre knows there is a mystery because suddenly Honor ceases to mention his name, and when Honor gives her birthday-party in the country, she invites neither the sculptor nor the son of the Grand-duke.)

CHAPTER IX

A HOUSE-PARTY

It was on Friday, before luncheon, that most of Honor's guests arrived at the capacious house near Windsor which Mrs. Pembroke had rented for the Spring. Great excitement in the house of Mrs. Pembroke and her daughter. Honor herself had arranged all the flowers in the bedrooms for her friends, and now waited on the porch. To-night there was to be a dance in honour of her twenty-first birthday. Then her most intimate and chosen friends would remain over the week-end.

At twelve-forty-five the first car rolled up the drive.

Oh, those were the people mother had made her ask! The two heavy, young Italian *Contessine* with whom she had once gone to school.

They stepped out of the car and, of course, Honor was simply delighted to see them. The eldest sister, whose name was Laura, was short and fat with a beautiful face, but her hands were damp when she squeezed Honor's fingers. The younger girl, Yolanda, was dark and lank and melancholy-looking, really a handsomer specimen than her sister, although she did not seem so good-natured.

Honor accompanied them to their room and Laura chatted all the time.

Soon the second car arrived, and Honor, who saw

it from the window, rushed down to give the new party a welcome.

It was Christyn de Solterre, Solterre himself, and Christyn's maid, Pender, all in Sol's touring-car.

Solterre was in a very cheerful mood and insisted on making a noise in his throat like a claxton motor-horn, while he helped the chauffeur with a suitcase.

Then came another school-friend of Honor's, with her brother, and then came Alban Lodder in his two-seater. Then came Neilson.

Yes, Honor, you are kind and a dear friend, and Neilson loves you for what he hopes, but dares not imagine probable.

At one-thirty is luncheon. Neilson is ready before anyone else, so he stands at the bottom of the stairs in the hall, where he can watch the others as they descend. The stairs are ordinary stairs, and so one cannot see the top landing.

The first footsteps: whose are they? These are rather firm and belong to Alban Lodder, who tramps into view. He stands and talks to Neilson until Solterre and the Italian girls come too; and then comes Honor.

"What are you standing there for?" asks their young hostess, "come into my sitting-room." And she pushes them all into her sitting-room. But Neilson steals back to the stairs when the others are busy talking.

A light step is heard, a springing step, and silly Neilson's heart begins to beat a little more insistently. But it is Honor's girl-friend, so Neilson turns swiftly and gazes at rather a dreadful painting in the hall. Is Christyn not here after all?

"Where are the others?" asks the girl.

But when she is told she does not go to find them

immediately, she stands and smiles up at Neilson, who finds her very stupid and heartily wishes that she would move along. So he pretends to make for the sitting-room and she goes too. Politely he holds the door open for her, and when she has passed, he closes it after her but remains in the hall. When he turns, he faces Christyn, who has watched the entire little performance from the landing of the staircase.

She stands with one hand resting lightly on the banister. Her face indicates mingled surprise, pleasure, and amusement, and at first she does not say a word. His eyes travel from the tips of her dainty white shoes to the coils of her heavy, dark-gold hair. She is wearing a quaint, creamy-white dress with a lace fichu on her bodice, and on her short sleeves are limp white frills.

Neilson took a step forward and held out his hand.

"It is not often that one has occasion to see an angel descending from Heaven," he said; "how do you do?"

"Honor must be a great friend of yours!" coquetted Christyn, smiling.

"Honor is a sport."

"Am I a sport, Mr. Neilson?"—quite mournfully.

"I hope so—fervently. Old Sol is a positive angel."

She took his hand. "He must be," she replied, shaking it, "he is my cousin." Then she added: "Alban Lodder is here, too."

"So is Francis de Solterre," said Neilson, significantly.

"And so is Honor," retorted Christyn, quickly, then laughed.

"Only the Girl with the Black Plaits is missing," said Neilson, "that would complete our circle."

"And John Parnell and Gabriel Herbert and Miss St. John!"

"That is rather damning you know, Bee-princess, to associate me only with them!"

"Bee-princess? Oh, yes!" She bit her under-lip. "So I keep company to the Panther and Sparrow, do I? You have a veritable menagerie."

"Miauw," said Neilson, smiling; but it had stung rather badly, especially as she had hit on the word "menagerie."

"Have I turned into a cat, suddenly?" questioned Christyn. "I am rather sorry. Besides, I should eat up the entire aviary department. No, you are fond of your pets, and I am being beastly."

"Please don't apologize," said Neilson, with mock stiffness, "I am surprised that you count yourself sufficiently a friend of mine to suggest that you could keep company to my menagerie. Your hive is not in my garden, Bee-princess, and you seldom wander from it to my sphere. You are guarded as befits your station, for are you not one day to become a queen-bee?" He made her a sweeping bow.

She was searching for a reply when the luncheon-gong sounded. There was to be an atmosphere of adventure in this house to-day. Christyn chuckled with joy as she turned towards the dining-room.

In the afternoon, everyone, except Christyn, played tennis. Very relieved at not being forced to join in the game, she sought out a shady part of the terraced garden, a charming bower of wisteria, not far from the tennis-court, and settled there with pencil and writing-pad to write—something, she did not know what. Verse it ought to be. She was surging with ideas and inexplicable emotions. The weather

was fine and it was Spring, she was happy and thrilled with life. Honor loved her, and Honor was beautiful; Francis loved her, Alban loved her, and Neilson sought her favour; they were all handsome and intelligent and delightful. Ah, life was good!

But there was nothing to write about. She could not very well put down: "The sun is shining, the wisteria is glorious, Nature is good, God is good, everyone loves me, and I am glad to be alive!" When she had written that she would have said all. But she felt more. She felt indefinably and intensely.

"Am I in love?" she asked herself happily. "No, it is because I am loved. Which of the three? I am vain. Neilson . . . he is interesting. What a pity, oh what a pity he is a vagabond, a bad man and a flirt. Why should I mind? I mustn't mind. Perhaps I shall love Banny because he loves me best. No, I do not think so, because he is not subtle enough. Then Francis? Yes, I think I love him very, very much indeed, everyone does. (No, that's getting out of it! Never mind.) Neilson will want to flatter himself that I am in love with him. He is a conceited devil, and ambitious. He flatters himself over the fact that I wanted to meet him so much that I actually came to his studio. But it was really only curiosity; the Bohemian atmosphere went to my head like wine, and that is why I danced like that. I want to fall in love because I am good-looking and it is Spring. No, I really must not flirt with Neilson, even if he is unhurttable, because it would be undignified. He is fearfully handsome—but Francis is more distinguished I think. Francis is unemotional, but some day he will fall in love violently, and then he will be charming. How delightful Banny is! He is adorably uncertain of himself, and so attentive—I am a beast!

A beastly, cold flirt! If Neilson ever fell truly and sincerely in love, he would be unsurpassable. I am sure I am a wicked girl to think like that! I have an ugly cruel mind. I am——"

"Leave it alone, my lady. It doesn't come like that. You will find no solution this very instant."

Neilson sat down on the stone bench beside her, the right corner of his mouth drawn up as usual, in a half smile. He smoothed his hair with his hand and looked her straight in the face.

What a flirt to come and search for her like this, thought Christyn. "Oh," she said. "You are a mind-reader, I see."

"I have not come to flirt with you," said Neilson.

Her surprise made her sit upright. "What else, then?" she asked, after a pause. She was so glad he had come but must not show it.

"I have come to have a nice talk with you. I admit it is rather a change, but after all, I don't flirt with Honor, so I need not with you."

"But Honor does not belong to the menagerie, does she?"

"Neither do you. I thought I had explained that before luncheon."

"True, and I must not be spiteful."

"You see," said Neilson with a sigh, "there is only to-day in which to learn you. That is a very short time, you must admit."

"You aren't staying over the week-end then?"

"No. Honor asked me to, but as I was certain Mrs. Pembroke longed for me to refuse, I said I couldn't possibly. She was, as I had foreseen, visibly relieved—I mean Mrs. Pembroke!"

Christyn's heart sank. There was something so charming in the way they always met. Both of them

were so elusive. She remarked : " One day is not a very long time in which to learn a person."

He liked the way in which she picked up his own figure of speech—to " learn " people. " Long enough to discover the fundamentals—*en tête-à-tête*."

The birds twittered and, among the leaves in a flower-bed in front of them, a white butterfly fluttered to and fro. A distant motor-cycle buzzing into earshot and out again, disturbed for a few seconds the lazy humming peace of the garden. They could hear the thud of balls on rackets from the tennis-players, hidden from sight by the shrubbery. " Fifteen-forty ! " Banny's voice. Then : " Sorry, Sol ! " " Outside ! Game ! "

A wistaria blossom dropped off the trellis on to Christyn's hair, but she did not notice it. She studied Neilson's face for a moment : the broad forehead and brown hair, the mobile nostrils and blue eyes, the weak, girlish mouth still drawn slightly to one side. He noticed that she was looking at him, and laughed.

" Yes, you think what so many others do. That I look effeminate. I wish I were brutishly ugly sometimes—and yet, on the other hand, it adds to the spice of life to know oneself more or less in the picture at all times ! "

She was not amused and so there was silence again.

" Isn't it curious," he said, " that for three months I have longed to see you and talk to you—I have had so much to say to you, and now that we are alone, I am dumb ? Won't you say something ? There must be a lot you want to say."

" I have nothing to say," she blurted out. " I feel a lot, and I wanted to write something . . . but it would not come, I just feel and feel ! "

"Are you happy? I think you must be. What you are incapable of doing at the moment, is thinking—you are feeling. That is why I think you are happy. One feels happiness, and it is thoughtless and wordless. But sorrow appeals more quickly to the brain, and one thinks. Besides, there are more expressions for sorrow than for joy. You are happy, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes! Why should I not be? But I am puzzled too."

"May I ask what about?"

"No, you may not ask that." She smiled. How funny it would be if she told him.

"Then I must guess."

"You cannot do that. If one cannot guess the mind of a male Solterre, how much less that of a female Solterre? Some day you may guess."

"How old are you?" he asked. "I knew you—I saw you once when you were quite small." (Surely this picturesque, demure little girl had nothing to do with the quick-witted, temperamental young woman who had danced at his studio once?)

"How strange! I shall be eighteen in August. I am not like eighteen, am I?"

"No, you are more like eight," he replied. (He looked at her mouth and thought: "I should like to kiss you.")

"Is that a compliment?"

"Oh, goodness yes! Is there anything so lovely as a child? So pure and clean, and scented and unperfumed?"

"And unmoulded," added Christyn. "I wish I were eight really. I should learn to love father, and there would be time for me to learn to grow into the groove and fit in it."

"Perhaps. But now you are a perfect, precocious, intelligent child. - I don't mean necessarily in looks. Your face is too oval, you are too slender. Oh, you look quite eighteen, in fact you look the same age as Honor," he laughed. "Appearance only, mind you."

"Please do not patronize. You will see to-night. I am not a child."

"I shall see. May I have the first dance?"

"Banny has the first dance, but you may have the second. So you saw me when I was really quite small? You knew my mother, didn't you?"

"Your mother was the first woman I ever loved," said Neilson. "I adored her, and, of course, she patted my head and called me a dear child, which hurt my feelings, but which I undoubtedly was, being barely sixteen years old. When one grows older one often smiles at the loves of one's boyhood, but I do not, because I shall never despise my sentiment for Lady Barthone; and if she had not existed, I should probably not be as wise as I am to-day. When I first saw you in front of the toy-shop, you gave me quite a shock. But I thought you were in Paris and so believed the likeness to be a coincidence. You are tremendously like her, but I think you are more intelligent and consequently kinder."

"Oh, hush, hush, Mr. Neilson!" Christyn laid a hand on his arm. She did not feel the tightening of his muscle. She was very solemn. "You must not speak like that to me of my mother." After a pause she continued: "I never knew her well because she was so engrossed in my stepfather, whom she adored and who was her lover till the last, and I think she was only gay and beautiful; but I never heard her say a catty or brutal word in her life—she was so light-

hearted. I cherish the memory of what she might have been to me if I had been closer to her. As it was . . ." Christyn broke off and shook her head.

Neilson was adoring this idyll in the garden. "When I knew her, you were very seldom with her. You were with a nurse all the time. When she left England for America, I should have liked to have died."

"Oh, poor Mr. Neilson!" said Christyn with astonishment. "You must really have loved her."

"No, you are not like her," said Neilson suddenly and with decision.

"Because I have been lonely and unhappy, and I hate other people to be lonely—I know what it feels like. But my mother smiled always and at everything, so I dare say she smiled at you, and it must have hurt more than usual because you were spoiled."

"I was not spoiled in those days. But I gave her the combined adoration I should have given my mother, sister, and sweetheart. My mother was a shrew, and my sisters—two of them—were 'Sports-girls,' big-boned, coarse-skinned giantesses, and the pretty one was lazy and as vain as a peacock. I poured out all I had to Lady Barthone and she laughed and said I was perfectly sweet."

Christyn shivered. "Oh, I know," she cried, "what it means to be told one is 'perfectly sweet'!"

"To begin with, it hurts one's vanity," said Neilson, "and it is funny, too. Humour always hurts at such moments."

A long silence again. Neilson pensively dug the rubber heel of his tennis shoe into the gravel. Christyn patted her hair and arranged stray wisps; the wistaria blossom fell from it to the ground. Neilson languidly stooped, picked it up, sniffed it and put it in his

buttonhole. Christyn did not know that it had not fallen straight from the trellis.

The silence became embarrassing, so she rose and smoothed the folds in her dress.

"Come and have some tea," she said. She was smiling. Oh, those silences! thought Neilson. This time he caught her eye. Hullo, he thought, his heart was beating. He reflected on the many times he had longed for his heart to beat lately. He could see by her face, by the heaving of her bosom that she too was curiously agitated. She held her head up so grandiosely, her nostrils so proudly dilated.

He stood before a stranger now. For some inexpressible reason this creature made him feel a young fool. She was a woman. Then the delicious creature blushed; tossed her head and laughed in a way that children do not laugh when they are entirely innocent and unaware of their power over some other living thing. "Come!" she said again.

"Bee-princess . . ." began Neilson, holding her eye.

"What is it?"

"I shall tell you this evening."

What he was going to tell her he did not yet know, but to say those words like that sounded romantic, and he wanted at all costs to interest her.

"Very well," she said indifferently. Oh, she had the instinct, too!

Without a word he followed her to the house, where some of the others had already gathered for tea. Solterre was there, and the Italian girls and Honor.

"Is the Viscount her brother?" asked the Contessina Laura of Honor, about Christyn.

"No," said Honor. "Why? Are they so much alike?"

"No, only I wondered because . . ."

"Oh, I see! Because he is the Viscount de Solterre? No, she has no brothers, and if she had one, he would be Viscount Blessington. She ought to have been a boy, but as it is he is going to be Earl Barthone one day as well. His father was a general in the Boer War and won some battle or other and got the title. It's a very rare case, that uncle and nephew should both be peers. Christyn is his cousin."

"He ought to marry her," giggled Contessina Laura; "that would settle everything, and then it would not matter that Lady Christyn is a girl."

"I don't see that there is anything to 'settle,'" replied Honor. "He can marry whom he likes—he is in a position to do so. Besides, there is no reason why he should marry at all just yet; Christyn is the last Solterre in the whole world, except Sol himself, and if anything happens to him she gets it all. They're awfully fond of each other—but nobody ever thought of marriage—especially as he always declares that he is going to remain a bachelor!"

"I still think it would be nice and romantic if they did marry each other!" persisted Laura.

"I don't. Everyone would say they did it with an ulterior motive."

"Oh, but if they fell in love!"

"Treacle! No one would believe them, anyway. I don't call that romance. I call it symmetrical neatness and cleverness. I quite believe that Old Growly—that's Lord Barthone—would like nothing better, but I don't suppose they're having any. They're far too fond of each other to go and get married!"

"Ha, ha! How cynical!" Laura wondered why Honor's face was so set.

"I suppose it is. When a rich middle-class girl gets engaged to a poor aristocrat, or a nice, penniless aristocratic girl marries a millionaire, no one can ever be quite convinced that it's a love match. It dovetails too well for public credulity. If wealth marries wealth, and poverty, poverty, one can believe it. If Christyn marries old Sol, people will say she is trying to keep her position and remain mistress of Barthone. It wouldn't work."

At this moment Solterre sauntered up to them, and they were forced to change the conversation.

The dancing began at ten o'clock, after a dinner-party to which several more guests were invited. It had been amusing to a certain extent, but rather a strain on Honor, who was, at best, an excitable hostess.

To an onlooker, the medley of women collected in the ball-room afterwards was interesting in so far as it was typical of the age.

Honor herself in a luxurious fragment of thin grey-blue silk, sewn with steel beads and cut like the gown of a Renaissance angel, flitted to and fro among her guests, introducing and chatting with teeth-clenched fervour. The plump Contessine Laura and Yolanda wore dresses of orange and sky-blue satin which reminded one of nothing so much as of elaborate bathing-dresses. There was one, a fat little Russian girl, dressed in white muslin with a pale blue sash and black stockings, whose plait of fair hair still adorned her back. Her mamma was "shingled" and wore her finger-nails bright red. There were well-fed looking girls in black satin with tight bust-bodices, who endeavoured to look flat, and whose skirts displayed well-shaped calves. There were thin young

women of the untitled Irish aristocracy with unwaved brown hair parted at the side, embellished with bands of velvet or small flowers, whose robes were neither short nor long, and whose noses were guilty of no powder. These wore white kid gloves. There were thin girls with no busts who wore the clothes of mythological Grecian youths and brushed their short hair severely and mannishly away from their brows. There were slim girls with good figures who showed no waist line, and a few who did. There were friends of Honor's in picture dresses. There were Jewesses. Among fifty women there were actually twenty-two girls who dressed their hair exactly alike, short, parted at the side and marcel-waved, as though they were the chorus of a first-class musical comedy and had just come out of the "evening-dress" act. There were good girls who looked like bad girls; yes, many more of these than naughty girls who looked saintly. There were frivolous girls who never smiled, and very serious girls who flirted all the time. A great many of the dancers never smiled as a matter of fact. Some incarnations of propriety danced vulgarly without realizing it. So many looked piqued without realizing it. Some looked positively cross.

There was Christyn de Solterre. Who would not love Christyn on such a night, this fire-salamander among the fishes?

Come, you modern young men, she is for you! Is she not of Honor's twentieth century? For the mysterious Solterre, she is a joy: sweet and clinging and subtle of expression and not too unconventional; a magnificent dancer; not too clever; temperamental. For the hearty Banny, she is a star to be worshipped; dignified and unapproachable, but always gentle and kind; intellectual and intelligent; born a century too

late, with the fragrance and romance of a period gone, yet radiating the ecstasy of the present.

For Neilson she is a soul unknown, a Hope. He cannot believe that she is an Ideal, and that he has met her. She cannot be an Ideal, merely because he has met her. It is not possible that he should meet an Ideal.

He watches her as she dances with Banny, her eyes keenly following the movements of her fellow-dancers. She looks as if nothing could escape her.

Oh, Christyn, where do you fail? (So thinks Neilson.) You are a child one instant, a sweet little sister, and a woman the next. You are haughty one moment, and later you seek to please by dancing like a fierce, passionate slave-girl. You are clever and quick in your speech, but you, alone, of all the others pour out the tea and help to wash the cups. How I love you for that! To-night one must crawl for the favour of a dance, because of the light in your beautiful eyes—for no other reason—but quite honestly you beg for anyone's friendship. One could not tire of you. And you are so beautiful.

At last the dance finished and the five minutes' interval, and Neilson went to claim his partner.

To-night she was a siren. She apparently enjoyed changing her personalities with her clothes. This girl one could say things to. He swung her out into the middle of the room. A waltz.

"I wish you would sing to me," he said.

"Oh dear!" From somewhere near the top of his shirt-stud a coy laugh was wafted up to him. "A great pleasure *that* would be!"

"As great a pleasure as to listen to the rippling of brooks, to the whispering of trees. . . ."

"Oh, *galant, galant!*"

"You don't like it?" he asked quickly.

"Mr. Neilson, there is so little gallantry nowadays that I haven't the heart to discourage the first little bit I meet with!"

"Ah, you encourage me!" They collided violently with Alban Lodder, who apologized but eyed Christyn with the affectionate intimacy that, without words, said: "You and I. . . ."

Neilson resumed: "Are you enjoying this dance?"

"Why do you ask? And you?"

"Too much. So much that it is beginning to trouble me. . . ."

"Mr. Neilson!"

"*Trop galant?*"

"*Un peu.*"

"A thousand apologies. I seem to know you so well. It is said, you know, that often people who have met only once and hardly spoken to each other at all, feel quite old friends at the second meeting—provided there are a sufficient number of strangers present."

No comment.

"Why should Time, which is so unfairly powerful, as it is, have the only right to ripen friendship?"

"Time," Christyn dreamt aloud.

There was Banny dancing with that girl, Vivyan Tempest, but watching Christyn all the time. Darling Banny, he loved her so that she nearly loved him back. During the last dance he had allowed her to guess his sentiments. She was still a little dazed. Banny was a sweet angel; a gay, jolly boy. Neilson made her feel as if she had drunk a lot of wine. He was gay too, but a gay devil, not an angel.

Oh, Banny, Banny, Banny! Banny loves me, how

thrilling! She danced with Neilson and thought of Banny.

The *encore* they did not dance but sat out in the garden. The garden was built in three terraces that swept down from the house like steps. There were great chestnut trees along the sides of the lawns and pergola walks with steps joining the terraces to each other. They sat down on a stone seat underneath a chestnut tree. He offered her a cigarette in silence. She laughed.

"No!" she exclaimed. There were two little spots of colour high in Christyn's cheeks.

"Is it 'I don't' or 'I don't want to'?" he asked.

"I won't," she replied.

"Ah!" He looked at her; her hands were clenched and she was laughing nervously, happily.

"What is it?" he questioned. "Why so intoxicated?"

"I'm just happy!" she gurgled. Then she laughed again.

"This time there is a very definite reason," he said. Then: "Who has been making love to you?"

"How marvellously impertinent you are!" she exclaimed, still good-humouredly. "And what amazing conclusions you jump to about me!"

"Not Solterre, at any rate," continued Neilson unperturbed; "it must have been Banny."

"Please don't be hateful and vulgar," she pleaded, "I was going to like you."

"Pray forgive me, and continue in the vein you started in."

"It is good to be loved," she said suddenly, throwing out her arms.

"It certainly can't be a very unusual experience

with you," Neilson said without moving so much as an eyelid.

"It is, very," she answered; "everyone adores me, worships me, admires me, befriends me, but no one loves me in the way I need it."

Neilson swallowed. This child played old Harry with him. He wanted to tell her so, but refrained.

"And?" he suggested. Oh, what did it help to be sophisticated in a case like this?

"And now . . . now someone loves me, perhaps. Of course it may be only admiration again." She thought: "Here goes!"

"And do you return it?"

It should be remembered that the staging of this little scene was perfect. The moon had done them the honour of appearing, and the band in the house was still playing a dreamy waltz; the garden seat was charming. So Christyn's eyes sought Neilson's in the dim light, and held them for a moment, while she slowly and slightly shook her head. She must be kind, she who was so happy.

This was romance, and it had taken her out of herself.

"Poor Neilson," she said softly, "you want to flirt with me so badly."

"Indeed I do not. I have the whole menagerie to flirt with."

"Poor menagerie," said Christyn.

"Do you know what I am?" asked Neilson, suddenly quite angry. His quarrel with Parnell came into his mind like a great cloud.

"One may live in a sty with swine and eat with them, but it need not make a swine of one," replied Christyn serenely. "I wanted to meet the man who

lived in the sty and never became a swine. This man woke up one morning and found that if he desired shelter and food at all, he must sleep and feed with swine. And, as it is unpleasant to be cold and hungry, he went and lived in the sty. After he had spent one night there, he had lost his self-respect so much that he thought he might just as well become a swine. He grovelled like the rest of them and told himself day after day that he was becoming more like one, until one day he caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror, and found that nothing could unmake a man of him. . . ."

"The mirror was the eye of a very beautiful young girl," said Neilson.

"Will you finish the story for me, please?" asked Christyn, smiling triumphantly.

"Yes. Soon, he discovered that this mirror was a magic one and reflected everything as though it were beautiful, however ugly it was; so then he looked into a mud puddle—which is often a splendid reflector—and saw himself as he really was, worse than a swine because he still had the consciousness of a man. So he went back to the sty and hated himself ever afterwards, wishing he had never seen what he could have been in the beautiful young girl's eyes."

"You are spoiling my story!" cried Christyn.

"You are no poet!"

"I confess that yours was the more charming fairy-tale."

"It was not a fairy-tale, it was real history. And after he saw himself in the magic mirror, he saw what he could become, that he was not a swine, and so at last he attained his ambitions."

"And then?" asked Neilson.

"Then . . . then he lived happily ever afterwards."

Neilson laughed shortly. "And the lovely mirrors?" he asked.

"I don't know what happened to them," admitted Christyn lamely.

"Then I will tell you: they stopped reflecting people's souls. And one day there came a Prince Charming and they became his private property. And he never, never found out that they were not mere eyes, but really mirrors. That's where the story is sad."

"The owner of the mirrors would never give them to such a crude Prince Charming!" returned Christyn with some warmth.

"All Prince Charmings are more or less fools," stated Neilson; "they are always spoiled either for their good looks or their royalty or their morals . . . and they are always good."

Neilson was burbling on without caring in the least what he was saying; he watched her intently.

"I never mentioned the Prince Charming, anyway," replied Christyn. "I should hate the type."

"What right have you to judge a splendid young creature like Alban Lodder?" Neilson heard himself say. "What are you in your gilded cage to feel superior?"

Christyn could only gaze at Neilson. He must be drunk.

"Don't you understand that Lodder and Solterre alone are for you?" he continued babbling light-headedly, tripping his words in feverish, careless haste. "Make up your mind. . . ."

"Neilson!" she cried, distressed, "what are you saying? Are you mad?"

But suddenly he stooped, caught her hands and kissed them, then was gone, and she was left alone on the bench in the moonlight.

Now the people were swarming through the open ball-room windows into the garden, for the waltz was over.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTYN AND NEILSON

CHRISTYN rose, and pressing her hand to her breast entered the house again. Her emotions were in a tumult and a pulse was hammering in her throat. It could not be that she was attracted by that bounder. She had said things she had never meant to say—those absurdities about the swine and the pig-sty and the mirrors. She realized that she had called him Neilson like his intimates did; it was abominable. And, of course, he had taken advantage. It was not possible, was it, that he should feel any interest for her beyond the usual amusement he derived from any member of her sex?

As if on wings she danced with Solterre and the adoring Banny, and all the time she was silent and scarcely heeded their conversation. She could not think of Banny any more. There was only Neilson now.

She tried to order herself to stop analysing her emotions, telling herself that it would not help her. Then she remembered that Neilson, that very afternoon, had said the same to her.

Almost an hour later he came again and solemnly asked her for another dance. She hesitated, then gave him the only one that remained. It was the last. Eagerly she fox-trotted and one-stepped with Banny and Solterre, and, so that they should not realize how

strange she felt and how light-headed, she tried to talk. Banalities. What rubbish one chattered at dances!

Middle-aged men adored her at night; their awkward compliments made her want to giggle. Oh, how unlike herself she felt! Here was a new Christyn in a new life. After all, how lovely it was to be wanted! She was enormously conscious of her charm and beauty. But there was still one small point of vanity upon which she wished to be satisfied. . . .

Banny unconsciously assisted her:

"Chris, what have you done with Neilson to-night? He's quite dithery. You've knocked him off his noddle. Poor devil!"

"I don't quite understand your . . . your idioms, I think, Banny."

"Have I got to be more explicit? He's dotty about you!"

"Oh, but he is such a flirt, Banny, he could never really be . . . !"

"My dear Chris, this time he is. Right off his nut. I know him well enough to judge, you know! Neilson, of all men, too!"

Something choked Christyn. She wanted to cough, to cry, to laugh.

"He is such a *poseur*!" she was arguing, "one never knows when he is sincere. He may be fishing for my pity in order to be able to boast about his conquest of me afterwards!"

Sir Alban gasped in astonishment. "Good Lor'!" he exclaimed. "Is that really what you think, Chris?"

And it suddenly struck her that it was an unworthy thought; and she was quite miserable. The joy of everything left suddenly, as suddenly as it had come.

Why had she allowed such a mean little idea to become conscious? Now she could never be straightforward with Neilson again, she felt; she would always be trying to read the intentions at the back of his head. "That," she told herself, "is what happens to people who lose a little of their simplicity without gaining much cleverness. It is I who am at a disadvantage, for unless people are really wicked they will not enjoy tricking their simple comrades; but a conceited person or a suspicious one is always fair game."

So, later in the evening, Christyn said to Neilson: "Please don't tell me fibs or pretend things to me because I am sure to believe you."

"Did I ever lie to you?" asked Neilson, frowning. "What have I said? How could I lie to you? You, of all people."

"Oh no. You never lied to me, I know. But you might as a joke, and I appear so much more sophisticated than I am."

Her heart had begun to beat again; like a fool, she told herself, like a fool. All at once she felt as if she stood on the edge of an abyss and had to jump.

She said lightly: "Please don't think it clever to make me love you; it would be so easy if you tried."

She had done it, she had said it. She was whirling through space. There was no world save Neilson. Complete silence. What else could there be?

"It would be so easy if you tried," echoed in Neilson's ears. She looked him full in the face and they both stood still, both breathless in the middle of the ball-room.

"I am not fighting bravely at all," Neilson laughed foolishly, "and I ought to fight. I can't."

"The inevitable has happened. I knew it would. I knew. I knew. I *knew*."

Then, like a naughty child, she ran away. She ran into the garden, her teeth clenched so that they hurt her. She was glad she had said it. She was happy, full of defiance. She leapt like a small girl as she ran. Neilson followed her beyond the lawn which swept down from the first terrace down to the garden seat again.

"Say it again . . . it is not true. I did not hear properly!" he called to her, catching her gloved hand.

She turned round and faced him, her eyes shining; she was as pale in the half-light as her dress.

"This is June, we are young and both of us are beautiful. Oh, of course we are beautiful . . . haven't we looking-glasses? And the moon is new, and the garden full of flowers, full of scent, and the music is playing, and we are mad, mad! Of course we are mad."

"Go back to the house, Bee-princess, and don't play with me. Life is too extravagant; there is a flaw somewhere. You are playing with me."

"I am not playing with you, I tell you. I am only eighteen years old. You have known fascinating women. What can you see in me, a child who knows nothing? It is not true, it is you who are playing with me. Oh dear God, what has happened to me?" She put her hand to her eyes. "What has happened? I have lost my senses. It is you! What have you done to me?"

"I have loved you," said Neilson, bowing. "I adore you."

"Yes," breathed Christyn, "yes; then it is true?"

"You believe? You trust me?"

"How pitiful if you played with me! What an easy victim you would find me!"

"Oh, my dear, my dear! You are good, you angel." He kissed the glove once more.

Now the music stopped; the dance was over. They both stood quite still for a moment. Then the band started again, and Christyn held up a finger, listening.

"They are playing 'God Save the King,'" she said, "and we are not there." She looked apprehensively at the house. "I am going to run up to my room. It must be five by now." She raised her eyes to his, uncertainly, half-guiltily.

He stooped to take her hand again, but this time she shook her head and turned back towards the house slowly, motioning him away. It was all rather like a dream.

He did not follow, but watched her as she walked across the lawn. Then he turned and wandered down a path that led to the wistaria-bower. There he sat down on the stone seat and let his head fall into his hands.

"It has happened!" he whispered aloud, quite bewildered. He felt fearfully excited, with a desire to weep; to let the tears which made his throat ache roll freely down his cheeks. A sob occurred. The sound of it shocked him, brought him to himself, and he sat up stiffly and took out a cigarette.

The birds were twittering in the shrubs. Somewhere a frog gave a final croak. A distant cock crowed. The guests were departing, and there was a noise of motor-cars. Quite unexpectedly the daylight was there. And now the last car was going.

There was a hymn in George Neilson's heart; no words in his brain. His nerves were absolutely strung and taut. He could think nothing; could do nothing but smooth his hair with his hands like a man dazed. He began to laugh. Then his mind became a blank

and he stopped thinking for a long time. When he came to he rose and walked swiftly towards the house. He had an impulse to stand underneath Christyn's window and imagine her behind it. But Christyn was there, before open casements, staring into the horizon.

She noticed him at once. Her room was on the first floor, creepers reaching up to it from the ground.

"I want to come down," she told him with great seriousness. "I wanted to all the morning, but now that you are there I think I must."

"No, no!" Because Neilson was enchanted with the idea, he felt he must be stoical, felt it his duty to advise her not to give him this pleasure.

"I shall," she replied with passion. "I am going to! I am going to climb out. I am going to do what eloping maidens do—climb down by my sheet!"

She was gone, and soon the sheet, fastened from within, hung outside the window. With difficulty she managed to kneel on the window-sill, then insert her bare toes in some trellis-work outside, gripping the linen with both hands. Neilson watched her slide down, then caught her so that she would not have to jump too far. He made himself blind to her while he held her, numbed himself as he set her gently on her feet. They both laughed.

"And now?" he asked, suddenly grave.

"Now," she answered defiantly, "we can talk."

"You are marvellous," he said. "It is sweet that you are afraid of nothing. It's so beautifully young of you. Fortunately the big windows of the ball-room are still open, so I shall chase you back soon. Otherwise I would never have allowed you to come down so quietly. I love your courage."

She tossed the hair off her shoulders and laughed. It lay in thick clusters on the white silk dressing-gown which she had substituted for her ball dress. Neilson feasted his eyes upon her. Nothing remained of the sweet lady of the evening. This morning found her careless, daring, primitive, and rebellious of the conventions.

Her toes dug into the soft, cool, dewy grass. It gave her such a pleasant sensation to feel the green so closely. She took Neilson's hand like a child.

"Let us sit under the big chestnut tree," she said, "and you will have to listen to everything I have to say; and everything you have to tell me, I shall love to hear."

"Everything I could tell you, you would hate, I am afraid."

"No. And you shall not worship me and put me on a pedestal, do you hear? You shall love me as I want to be loved, for once. Tell me things that you want to tell, and nothing will horrify me because I have no morals."

"What?"

"I have no morals, I said. Morals are the crutches and cushions of the weak and the spiritual sinners. Laws are the crutches of the social would-be sinners. 'What reason is there that I should not steal?' says a man. 'It is a sin,' says his conscience, but he hasn't any pity for the loser. 'And I shall go to prison,' says his common sense. But if he would be justified in stealing ill-gotten wealth, what then?"

"Is stealing ever justifiable?"

"Of course it is. There is a close resemblance between stealing and competition."

"Swoop!" said Neilson, "that is pretty swift."

"I didn't say thieving. Ordinary thieves need laws just as they need morals and religion."

"And you do not?" he asked, enchanted with her simplicity, not mocking her.

"I don't know. There is no one to advise me. I have to fight out every little, tiny bit, all by myself. I am sure I often go wrong, but now there is simply nothing left to trust but my own intuition. You see, so many people say splendid things without meaning them at all, either because they sound immensely clever or because they sound so good and virtuous. They give advice they would never follow themselves. No one seems to care about what happens to the individual whom they are advising. My opinion is that codes are no good because each person needs a different one to suit his own character."

"And your difficulty?"

"Oh, molehills! My life is one perpetual novel of which I am both author, actor and reader. Do you know, it has been so funny. The Martinezs were extraordinary people who kept appearances on top. My stepfather had no money really. It was a life of cinemas and omnibuses and no theatres, but expensive clothes and a chaperone who did all kinds of odd jobs. Then suddenly, Claridges and breakfasts until mid-day. A life of rising at ten in the morning and Phillipa cleaning her teeth in the bathroom of the suite while her father shaved, with mother occasionally chatting by the door in her chemise. Nothing mattered, and that part amused me. It was all a stage-setting and I rather enjoyed the acting. And now I have changed theatre. Money is not discussed with me, and I am not allowed to do any of the things which were once quite in the natural course of events. I play the lady. Yes, it is all acting—like

with you. So you see the gulf between us is nothing so dreadful after all, and I wanted a chance to tell you that."

"Poor lonely little actress!"

"Yes, it is lonely sometimes—like with you. You do not belong to your studio much more than I do to Solterre, do you?"

"Yes, just a little more perhaps, because I chose it. But the spectator in me is undoubtedly strong."

"Only one thing makes me unhappy," continued Christyn, "and that is the feeling that perhaps my life is always going to be a rôle and that I shall never have the chance of *living*. That idea appals me. Or perhaps I want to act my own play some day. It is as if strangers always wrote the parts for me, and I have to lead other people's lives. Can't someone just create the part of Christyn, one day, that I need not act with effort? Even that day at your studio, I was playing the part of a Bohemian. This night I have been acting the part of 'Lady Christyn,' and I used to play the Great Misunderstood."

"And you suffer?"

"Of course not! If ever I, personally, were dragged in it would hurt. So long as the romantic, brain-created rôle of Christyn exists, every incident is no more than an experience to be noted, and every newly-met acquaintance a character in the play." She pressed his hand. "To-night I am I. If the girl that is me to-night were hurt..." She shivered.

"You are not an experiment to me. You are a live person, a fellow-spectator," said Neilson.

"That is it!" replied the girl. "You are a fellow-spectator, someone whose eye I shall want to catch while a play is being acted. That is where Francis

falls short. He refuses to act, he always *is*. I can never quite make out why it is that while I act, he sits in the audience, and when I sit in the audience and look on, he is up to his neck in seriousness. You are so different, how is it that you are such friends? "

" We were at school together and were interested in each other from the day we met. He is loyal in some ways, and my cousin Banny is loyal too. They refused to drop me when I was in disgrace, although Sol was almost forced to. You know we are called the three *Connoisseurs* : ' Wine, Women and Horseflesh.' Sol is wine, and Banny horseflesh, and . . . "

" And you are Women? "

" Don't be shocked. Sol is not a drunkard and Banny is not a gambler, and I am only artistic! "

" I am not shocked. Only, of course, you act a conscious part when you are with Sol? "

" No, I really don't." Neilson replied to her direct question with a direct reply and made no comment. It was his intention to let her talk.

" I do. I suppose it is because you have labelled yourself ' poet ' and ' artist ' that you can be natural. Whereas I am merely labelled ' girl ' without any particular species attached."

" Yes, only I think I was in danger of being forever cast for the rôle of artist, natural to me in so far as it is a self-created rôle—but am seldom allowed to be just mere man."

Neither of them talked for a few moments; both of them were lost in thought.

" She is more than ' Lady Christyn,' " thought Neilson.

" He is not only a poet," she mused.

" Could I ever take it upon me to ask of her the

manifestation of her other self? " he asked himself. And :

" Could I face the responsibility of giving him another goal in life altogether? " she thought.

Aloud he said : " I want to ask you something. Do you think women ever dare marry the men they love if there are real obstacles, regardless of conventions? "

" Do you think that men ever really try to overcome these obstacles properly to achieve the surrounding of the women they love? " she replied dreamily.

" What do you mean by 'achieving surroundings'? "

" I am not talking of money at all now, but I mean that most men expect a sacrifice on the woman's part in the way of atmosphere. Men are so ready to deceive themselves and women into believing that money will do such a lot of things it won't do. A little trying to understand will do as much. I am thinking of my mother who married beneath her when she became Juan Martinez's wife. Not beneath her in any but the subtlest way. It was just that her husband did not try and achieve her natural surroundings; he just didn't think them necessary. But she was not even an actress at heart. At first perhaps, she felt strange, but afterwards her very soul changed to fit her surroundings. I think," rambled Christyn, " that men, in their hearts, create their standard of social atmosphere from that of the first women they ever loved in their lives. More often than not it is their mothers who give them this standard. The various grades of refinement or otherwise, produced by these first objects of affection, seem ever after to be their ideal for the women they choose as their mates."

" No." Neilson shook his head. " I don't agree.

I find that a man wants to create his own paradise for his woman."

"Yes, his own—not hers. And his own is, as a rule, inspired by the very first love of his life, be it his mother, or sister, or any other. Unconsciously he feels 'what was good enough for Her is good enough for *her*,' and he will work willingly up to his own standard, but no further."

"You do not take into consideration the man who has absolutely no standard for the paradise of a woman," replied Neilson; "moreover you did not answer my first question."

"Are there men with no standards? But to return to your question: I believe that women very, very often marry the men who really want to marry them because, unfortunately, they both pretend to themselves and each other that they have the same tastes and ideals. If there are obstacles they will both pretend there are not."

"Come, come! There are sometimes some obvious obstacles. Also I asked whether women dared marry the men they loved, not only the men who love them."

Christyn raised her eyes from the ground which she had been studying, and gave him a sudden smile.

"You ask *me* that?" she said. "It strikes me all at once that I have been miles out of my depth for the last few minutes. I can't answer your question, Neilson, because I don't know."

"Don't put down arms and fight shy. You have been arguing until now. Speculate further. Dare!"

"I sometimes think," continued Christyn bravely, "that women only marry men because they know nothing about them at all, and invest them with illusionary charms. Obstacles then become positive

flower-beds. But to be honest, I don't know. I have known so few young girls intimately. Only the Girl with the Black Plaits—and she doesn't count."

"No, she doesn't count. She could be—no, I won't say it!"

"Don't. She is a cynic. A real, real one, you know. Her cynicism is born of malice, not melancholy. She is so immensely interesting—quite diabolical. She has sometimes been quite kind to people while her eyes were sparkling with contempt."

Neilson chuckled, then said deliberately: "That is why I love to flirt with her. She is unhurttable."

"No!" answered Christyn quickly, "she is capable of being absolutely whipped and bruised in her vanity. She will hate you if you do not love her but pretend to do so."

Neilson threw back his head and laughed. "That settles it!" he exclaimed, studying Christyn carefully. But Christyn stood still, frowning, and put her hand on his wrist.

"You have been happy just now?" she asked. "A little? Then please do not deliberately try to hurt anyone, not Phillipa—even her vanity. Pain is pain. I wish people would realize that. A broken doll is as much of a tragedy to a little girl as a broken heart is to a big one; or bruised vanity as much as—as ridicule. You remember we spoke of ridicule this afternoon?"

"My dear little lady, the amusement I shall derive from flirting with Phillipa is well worth the pain it will cause her!"

God! what had come over him suddenly? He knew this was no argument. And in his natural perversity he purposely scourged himself in this test of her sportsmanship.

Christyn's eyes narrowed. "Would it amuse you to hit Phillipa on the shins with a hammer? Not a hard knock, but one she will feel?"

"Listen. I promise to play fair. I will not tell her in a voice trembling with passion that I adore and worship her. I will merely flirt—and see what happens."

"H'm!" Christyn stood pensively. Then she suddenly laughed and shivered. "Let us go on the lawn," she suggested, "the sun has come out." She began to walk towards the grass.

"You are not merely chilly," stated Neilson, keeping step with her.

"Perhaps not only chilly," she replied with an air of mischief that sounded forced.

"Very well; you do not feel merely physically chilly. Tell me—what is it? Why did you shudder? I ask you."

They strolled across the lawn in the early sunlight. She hesitated before replying, gazing, as was her habit, at her feet. Then she looked up. Her face hardened.

"Are you enjoying the way you are talking to me? I cannot explain what I feel when I take a peep into your life. Perhaps I am a prude. At all events I am disgusted. That is the truth."

"And yet I am sympathetic to you?" he asked, interested, and not at all offended.

"Yes, immensely. But perhaps that is only when you act up to me. Why . . . why did you allow yourself to be known under the soubriquet of 'Women'?"

"My upbringing. But, strangely, I am quite ready to take a leap out of that sphere once and for all. Of late it has begun to pall on me."

Christyn said very wearily : " I am tired of sex."

Neilson glanced at her sideways. Why the devil was he behaving like this? He had not wanted to behave like this originally. He loved women's assets. She had them all. Tiny fingers that stood for tenderness, and a white skin to display her coolness, and scented hair. She had things which other women did not possess, and all the things they did possess. He worshipped women because she was a woman.

" You love me now," she was saying, " because I suffice to this mood."

" You will always suffice to any mood because you create it. And you do as you please because you have brains. Do you know why I want to hurt Phillipa? Because she is degrading—rottenly degrading."

" You don't want to hurt anyone, you want to amuse yourself."

" Incidentally. Some women give their bodies and ask for men's souls. The bargain is one-sided. And besides, she is clever and has a woman's intuition. She is able to defend herself, is she not? All she has to do is to snap her fingers in my face and I am the fool, not she. The sport is purely intellectual."

They were near the house now and made for the open drawing-room window.

" Neilson," said Christyn steadily, " you are the first man whom I really love. If you are the cynic they make you out and are playing with me, you will have the immense satisfaction of knowing I am your complete dupe. I am entirely in your hands, and I trust you and love you. You say you are honest and I believe you. I believe you, you understand? I love you."

Neilson looked down into her face and bit his lip. " Jove, you are clever," he said.

Christyn winced, then quoted :

“ Body, Brain and Spirit three,
Join for true felicity,
Are they parted, then expect
Someone's sailing will be wrecked.”

They were standing together on the step before the big windows.

“ God bless you,” he said, suddenly fervent, as he held the door open for her.

Then it was that she turned round fiercely.

“ What? ” she cried. “ You ask God to bless me? What for? For my ‘cleverness’? Do you know that I never cry? But in a minute I shall howl, I warn you. Do you want brains alone? Then ask Honor to argue with you. I cannot defeat you in an argument when you try. But you have not tried all morning and I feel a fool, an ass, an idiot! I have been burbling away so seriously! Oh, I don't know what to do. You need not be surprised that you have not been loved tenderly. I want to be tender, I do, I do. But you have rebuffed me and told me I was clever. You may love me in your way, it is quite possible, but that isn't enough. Oh, why is nobody tender with me? ” The tears welled in her eyes. “ Don't look at me if it embarrasses you. Am I so cold? No, I know I am not! I don't want anybody's so-called intellectual friendship any more, I really don't. Aunt Amelia's dutiful pecks on the cheek, and Honor's pats on the back, and Francis with his patronizing admiration. Do you think friendship is naturally devoid of tenderness? Tenderness is what we need, all of us, and intelligence, not cleverness. Until you mentioned Phillipa this evening I thought you were arguing seriously and sincerely. Do you

know how humiliating it is to discover that one's companion has been arguing without conviction, only for the pleasure of hearing one talk, only to get a rise out of the poor fish? To you, evidently, spontaneity and cleverness can only be considered separately; you don't feel capable of being spontaneously clever. Yes, smile in your superiority! Why don't you show your contempt for the sex that allows its tears to flow publicly?"

"Christyn!" agonized Neilson, his face like marble.

"Now you are going to squeal under the lash! You fool, suppose I am acting? Why don't you tell me how clever I am now?" she flared. "There were a hundred ways of letting me know you understood my attitude, but you sneered. It's all in the tone of voice." She stopped, completely out of breath, and put her hand to her forehead with a dry, childish sob.

"And what am I to say?" asked Neilson, troubled.

"And what am I to do now?"

"Give me your hand."

She spoke on an indrawn breath, but with sudden quietness, and he obeyed meekly, trying not to think. He could not bear that babyish sob. He felt as though he had beaten a kitten, had taught a child the meaning of the word "cruelty" or "meanness." Yes, meanness. Until now she thought that no one was really bad except through necessity or carelessness. And yet she knew Phillipa. But Phillipa was a devil of quite another world.

She held his hand tightly with one hand and stroked it feverishly with the other, not saying a word, but every now and then giving one of those tearless sobs which he hated. They took him back ages and ages.

He had not heard such sobs since he himself had been a small boy and they had been his relief. At last she spoke again :

“ Don’t despise me.”

He gazed at her eyes, brimming with tears; her pathetic little red nose and parted lips. Good God, did one despise children?

“ I am not a child, and yet I behave like one,” she said with great sadness. “ I am a grown woman. Of course you must think that I want to appeal to your chivalry.”

“ Stop thinking,” he ordered, almost roughly. “ Do you want to make me howl like a birched schoolboy? Because you have birched me.”

Christyn, Christyn, what are you now? Steady your lips, straighten your shoulders and the child has fled! Neilson feels dizzy as he watches the change come over you. Have you grown taller suddenly?

Still she was stroking his hand. Was this young woman his mother that he should all at once feel impelled to kneel to her and bury his face in the hem of her skirt? Was she that, with her tragic tear-stained face, instead of a hurt child?

Back to Earth, Sweet Earth of June, of dew-sprinkled grass and of wistaria, of twittering birds. And now the sun is high in the heavens.

Leave Neilson standing there before the window, bowing over Christyn’s hand—to kiss it. To kiss the hand of his Lady, to bow low to his mother, and to mingle in his fervour the tenderness fit for his child.

CHAPTER XI

BANNY

SIR ALBAN LODDER, Bart., of Fantenden :

Tall and square. Altogether square somehow. A square forehead and a square jaw and square shoulders. A clean-shaven face with blue eyes and good teeth. And, as far as possible, an exterior indicative of his character.

Nothing interested Alban so much as England, and England because it contained Fantenden. The perfection of Fantenden was the aim of his life. Farmers and tenants, and all that could be done with the land. So much for cultivation, so much for pasture, and so much for pleasure, etc., etc. Lucky, the farmers on Alban Lodder's estate. Alban was still sufficiently naïf to strive towards his own ideal of perfection. "Begin at home," he said, and tried to be good. He succeeded in being good, very, very good. He never caused anyone any sorrow, he tried not to. When people talked horses with him, they gave him pleasure, enormous pleasure. When people talked tennis, he was glad too. He loved to discuss the books he had read, and English politics, but often refrained because he thought he would bore his friends. He was so perfectly adaptable that he always wanted to do what the people he was with wanted to do. Hence his devotion to Fantenden, for there he could do as he liked. He could discuss animals all day if he liked,

and read all evening the books he was told to read, then dream into the fire in the winter time, and into his pipe in the summer, sitting on a bench on the lawn. He liked being alone; just he and his pipe and his jolly West Highland terrier, and a few birds whose twittering only enhanced the silence in the garden. Although he dreamt romantically, he did not dream in poetic words. He dreamt of jolly kids with long naked legs knocking about the old place, and a topping woman. . . . Pretty dreams they were, and somehow her shape was like Christyn's, only he couldn't ever catch her face. Such silly things worried him. What if the jolly kids would love their mother more than they loved him? That would be insufferable. And worse, what if the topping woman took more interest in the jolly kids than in him?

Companionship. That was it. Only it must be the right kind. He could not bear the kind of person who, when out for a walk, continually pulled his sleeve with: "Oh, *do* look at that sunset!" or "*Do* look at that blaze of colour over there!" Sickening that was, as though he needed teaching in appreciation of the countryside, he who lived for the country! And his imagination was all right too.

Banny at the age of ten: at school. One learnt there, for the first time, to refer to Mummie and Daddy as the Mater and Pater. The Mater, née Miss Neilson, was a jolly decent sort and had induced the Pater to send him to this particular school because swarms of Neilson cousins had been sent there, and as Banny was an only child he might have felt lonely elsewhere. Not that the Mater thought too highly of her first cousin, Tom Neilson of Hilford, or of the way he dragged up his dozens of children; but one of his younger sons, Georgie, was a very nice little fellow

(he had a beautiful soul, said the Mater) and seemed to get on very well with Banny. Georgie's evident dislike of his parents and brethren almost inclined to serve as a recommendation to Lady Lodder, and he was often invited to Fantenden. Georgie and Banny were friends in spite of the two years' difference in their ages, Banny having a hero-worship for Georgie, and Georgie watching over Banny like a dog.

Banny at the age of thirteen: public school. For four generations, Lodders had been educated at Eton, but Banny begged piteously to be allowed to go to the same school as George Neilson. He and George still wrote to each other and spent most of their holidays together at Fantenden. But when Banny arrived at his new school, he found his place as George's shadow usurped by a stranger, by young Solterre, a boy scarcely older than himself. George, unhappy in his present surroundings, was already growing lofty, aloof, lonely. Banny, who had always loved, but had nevertheless been puzzled by him, could not help but make way for Sol, who, with remarkable precocity, seemed to give "Neilson" infinite sympathy and understanding. Banny would soon have been left in the cold altogether if Sol, with the tactfulness of a slightly guilty conscience, had not included him rather pointedly in their discussions and little adventures. In return Sol stole Neilson for the holidays, which Banny resented.

When Banny was fourteen, the war broke out. There was an upheaval at Fantenden and the Pater went out to France. Banny and his cousin for some reason began to grow a little apart. Somehow, however, Sol and Banny became greater friends, and, strangely enough, Sol was now the strongest link between Banny and George (who was fast evolving into

Neilson). Neilson's verse now began to appear in odd journals, weekly and monthly, and in certain volumes of poetry by schoolboys. Banny and Sol were both extravagantly proud of him; Banny loved reading the verse, but was more keenly interested in the pony he had at Fantenden; Sol was enthralled by the writer of the verse, but enjoyed ponies too.

In 1916 Banny's Pater was killed in action and Banny became Sir Alban. That was a strange feeling—that the Pater should be dead. Not that Banny had ever been thrillingly devoted to him or had seen overmuch of him during his lifetime, but still, he was sorry, for the Pater had definitely existed as a comforting background; he and a Nanny had been there to see respectively indirectly and directly to the bodily welfare of the heir of Fantenden, with the Mater doing her best for his immortal soul. Just when he was getting used to this state of affairs, George Neilson threw his brother Eustace out of the window and had to leave school, and Banny was forced to console himself with the friendship of Solterre alone.

Banny at the age of nineteen: Jesus College, Cambridge. The Mater had caught Theosophy, travelled to India and back again, and had now married an ex-Indian Army Colonel called Basinthwaite (pronounced Basné), who had impressed her with the fact that he was a "master." Sol was up too, at King's. Banny and he had great times in those days; they rode together in steeplechases, both loved motor-cars; at other times talked themselves hoarse, and Sol instructed Banny in the art of being an elegant, and not too-thorough Bohemian. Neilson, the renegade, was a cult with them both. They corresponded with him still; in fact neither of them had lost sight of him even during the war or when he went abroad. When

they came down from the 'Varsity, they remained close friends and continued to go about together a great deal. Sol stayed for week-ends with Banny at Fantenden, Banny often went to Barthone.

Now he was adoring Christyn. He adored her so much that he pressed his knuckles into his eyes. This was in London in the month of June. He could not sleep, he thought of her so much and so vividly. He could not understand her at all, nor why she did not tell him definitely whether she loved him or not. He had not seen her since Honor's house-party. Neilson's unmistakable regard, nay, passion for Christyn, troubled him. He hated to think that Neilson was being hurt, and obviously he would be hurt, hopeless outcast that he was. Was Neilson a hopeless outcast? asked the devil tauntingly. He was, after all, the only one of them who had achieved anything that counted with Christyn. Oh, yes, yes, answered Alban with pathetic eagerness, surely Neilson was out of the running. Solterre? Sol was her cousin. But Sol was mean. He seemed to ticket both her and Honor with a label "reserved in case of need." It was not fair. He deserved to be played with, begged he did. He was devilish jealous of Christyn, was Sol, and equally so of Honor. Last year Honor had been pally with Neilson, and Sol had begun to get catty. Rotten crowd Neilson had round him, but Christy was too good for Sol. Sol thought so much of himself, and everyone thought so much of him that she would be totally eclipsed. Christyn ought to have a stage to herself.

This afternoon he was going to tea in Brook Street. No fear of meeting Neilson there. Curious, how Neilson had never before made him feel the possibility of his being serious about any girl, although he

always had masses of females hanging about him. Damn it that Christyn should attract him so much.

Tea-time: Old Growly, who is in town for a few weeks, and Aunt Amelia, and an odd girl with a white nose and very white protruding teeth who giggled at Solterre. Somehow, when Banny had walked up the steps of the house, he had imagined Christyn alone, perhaps seated at the piano, dressed in white. Perhaps Sol would be there. Silly of him not to remember Sol's Mater and Old Growly. Of course they are there. And Christyn is dressed in transparent black silk, and is pouring out tea for the damn lot. Oh, well, why should she be alone? Young girls are not deliberately made hostesses to young men when there are older women in the house. But he felt a sudden spasm of boredom pass over him as he entered the drawing-room.

Such a different Christyn to-day. Quite strange and polite and cool. Perhaps even stiff. Solterre fairly talkative, but in that mood in which he nearly forgets to say good-afternoon to Alban. Such an uncomfortable silence every few minutes. The girl with the white nose sits and smiles and nibbles daintily at medallion-shaped sandwiches, and giggles. Idiotic to pretend to eat those sandwiches in ten mouthfuls! Aunt Amelia talks about the weather and how much nicer it is this year than it was last. Are we going to have it fine for Ascot?

Old Growly barges in now and then with remarks that have nothing to do with it, and breaks the poor fine hair of conversation that these spiders have been trying so hard to throw. More silence.

Solterre will insist on talking to Christyn as though there were no one else in the room.

At last the girl with the white nose gets up and

thanks Aunt Amelia for a *lovely* afternoon, and says she must be going. Must she *really*? says Aunt Amelia, it is early yet. Oh, yes, she really must. So she shakes hands with everyone and goes, more or less awkwardly.

After her departure there is an absolutely interminable silence, and then Christyn addresses a remark to him. At last. Politics. Conservative party politics. Old Growly joins. They get quite friendly, and it actually turns into a conversation. They begin to forget to be self-conscious and they talk. The ice is broken at last.

And then Alban feels he must say "good afternoon" and depart. And he has not seen Christyn; he might just as well not have come at all. Why the devil can he never have the opportunity of talking to her alone?

As he shakes hands he takes the bull by the horns and whispers, almost fiercely: "Can't I ever get a talk with you?"

She raises her eyebrows. "Arrange a party at your flat with Honor and Francis."

"B'gad I will," says Alban.

A little dinner-party at Alban's flat two days later.

A telephone party with just Honor and Sol, and out of duty, and not to be obvious, Neilson. Also Honor's friend Vivyan, an old friend of Sol's, to make another girl. Aunt Amelia has been convinced that it really is quite all right if Christyn comes alone with Sol.

Things are gay here. After dinner we dance to the gramophone. Refreshments are served in the dining-room later.

And now is Alban's chance; now that the others are

eating and drinking and he is alone with her; for he has taken her to his pleasant library.

She is looking at an illustrated edition of Neilson's second volume of poems, and is particularly admiring one of Aline St. John's black and white drawings. Alban's eyes are burning as they fasten on her. He intends that they should burn.

When she has finished the book she begins to look at it again, starting from the last page.

"Please will you look at me?" asks Alban at last.

She obeys him, and her face is full of mischief.

"Don't you see what a flirt I am?" she laughs.

"You can't flirt with me, Chris, I love you so much. Besides which I don't believe you."

"How simple you are! Do you think I would have come in here with you, if I did not intend to flirt? Can't you see what a . . . a creature I am?"

"Don't talk like that, Chris!" He caught her hand. "You laugh at me up your sleeve, I know. You think I am a potty sort of chap, full of slang and all that sort of thing. A sort of romantic idiot."

"Why?"—drawing away her hand.

"Because I'm wildly, crazily, idiotically infatuated with you. . . ."

"Infatuated. . . . Yes, Banny, just that. No, don't be angry because it is not intended meanly." She folded her hands like a child saying its prayers and gazed earnestly up into his face. "Banny, please let me try to do a good thing. Let me tell you that you are mistaken. Yes, you are, Banny . . . !" Here Alban seized both her hands and kissed them.

"Mistaken! Sometimes I wish I were."

They looked into each other's eyes. He watched those of Christyn grow round and thoughtful. To her, Neilson, in his sophistication, faded into tired

flatness beside the honesty and childish purity of Alban Lodder. Neilson, whom she had only danced with twice this evening, as if he were a stranger.

God forgive Christyn now. Who was she to preach to Neilson or to Banny? She loved Neilson as he loved her. She was as infatuated with Banny as he was with her. She had expected the opposite to happen, for Banny was a man to trust, Neilson one to enjoy. She knew it was only an infatuation, but she longed to give way to it. No, no, no. Banny must not be hurt. She must tell him that he is mistaken.

"Didn't you know?" he asked savagely.

"Yes, I did. But I thought that if I took no notice and flirted very obviously, that you would respond to that. It was no use being coy."

"Christyn," said Banny, "if that's so, I don't want to see you any more. I can't bear it. It needs too much self-restraint. I can't help it if I shock you. I'm going away."

"Banny, no!" she cried, and her face twisted. "Oh, I didn't mean to hurt you. I would rather have done anything than hurt you. Please believe me, I implore you. Oh, what shall I do?"

She longed to fling her arms around his neck. And then anger seized her. If she had been a man now, she would have considered it quite her right to live in the present and love for the hour.

"Ah well, shake hands," said Banny, taking a deep breath. "That's all. I won't be a fool."

So Christyn bowed her head to the laws of womanhood, and did the honourable thing.

In the night Christyn lay awake and wept.

Indeed she loved Neilson. But she loved Banny, too, and that was her sin. She had never imagined

that such a thing as loving two men could occur ; she could not understand it and it was a shock. But she had been good. Alban will never know that there was once a chance for him.

She allowed her tears to flow. How the tears hurt us in the silence of the night ! She had been so noble, and there was no one to whom she could pour out her heart.

CHAPTER XII

NEILSON AND PHILLIPA

ALAS, Christyn is growing up. Growing up in the modern fashion. Her beautiful eyes are too wide open, and the pencilled eyebrows too often raised. The eyes see everything. Nothing escapes them, either ugly or beautiful or interesting. The eyebrows express mild surprise, not the wonder one expects in the awakening soul of the half-child. That Solterre is a subtle flirt no longer disturbs her. Why should he not be? She cannot condemn. Only the naïve, the innocent, can condemn, and she it not naïve any more.

At first she thought her heart would burst with pain when she realized she had left her childhood behind. She felt horror at the thoughts that occasionally came to her in the night. The thoughts came oftener, and the horror grew. And then she became accustomed to the thoughts, and the horror grew less and less. And then came a time when she was shocked at having forgotten to be horrified. And last of all came that stage of passiveness, when the craziest fancies and ideas sauntered unrebuked through her mind.

And now there was only a kind of surprise over the fact that so many things did not touch her deeply.

She is not ashamed of herself for disobeying her father's wishes. Now that she goes to the studio for her singing lessons, she is a frequent visitor there.

Solterre and Christyn understand one another. "Live and let live," is the arrangement.

She is not taken aback when she finds Phillipa and Amica there. The enormity of it amuses her. She has become well acquainted with all of them : Parnell and Gaby and Drayton and the " Sparrow." Of course there are always Solterre and Honor, and occasionally Banny comes too.

It does not startle her to see Neilson and Phillipa on terms that make Gaby and Solterre chuckle. She thinks of herself and Banny and Solterre, and shrugs her shoulders.

Three men have declared their love to her. The one is her beloved, and the other two she loves. Indeed, who is she to condemn anyone? Her lips curve and her eyes sparkle. She tells herself they sparkle brightly with unwasted tears. It does not pain her much to watch Neilson and Phillipa. But her heart has swelled with unrecognized disillusionment at her own self; she has sunk so low that she may not even utter a reproach !

Neilson is not good like Christyn. Phillipa is falling in love with him, and he encourages her. It is his ambition that she should fall in love with him, wretch that he is. Phillipa ought not to be a fool. He is so astonished when he realizes that she possesses any kind of emotion that he cannot help playing with her. Moreover, he despises her.

One day Christyn came to her senses. Her cheeks flamed, and her eyes sent out angry sparks. She made up her mind to speak to Neilson.

" I am not a fool," she said. " I am not the Sparrow or one of your menagerie. Either you leave Phillipa in peace, or I bid you adieu."

" Virtue," replied Neilson, surprised into haughty insolence, " virtue no doubt, but why? "

But Christyn could surpass him in haughtiness

if she chose. Also she could surprise him still further.

"By no means," she said. "It is not for me to be self-righteous. If Señorita Martinez had caught your fancy, I would wish you both joy, but as it is, the joy is one-sided."

"What do you mean?"

"The amorous emotion gives more pleasure than that of hatred."

Neilson smiled sleepily. "Have I succeeded so well already?" he drawled.

"Neilson!" Christyn spoke sharply. "Have you understood me?"

This time he flushed angrily.

"Most certainly. I will cease the ungentlemanly sport at your command at once, of course. And the soft-hearted Phillipa may bestow her affections elsewhere. It is cruel to play with so innocent a child."

"You have not understood me. Perhaps you flatter yourself on a certain point. *Bon amusement*, Mr. Neilson, and may you gather honey from other sources than from one proud Bee-princess!"

With that she turned on her heel and left him.

Christyn's rebuke irritated Neilson the rest of the afternoon. He sat on the window-sill and mused, completely out of temper. How dared she, after all, dictate to him his mode of conduct? Confound these women with their desire to reform everyone they met. Women hedged one in; women arrested science and held back any form of progress with their hopeless codes and dogmas, and their absurd sentimentalities. Was it not women who were the most violent anti-vivisectionists, in spite of the fact that vivisection had become imperative to the furthering of biological knowledge? Was not he, Neilson, after all, a student

of the human character? Experiments must be made, and it was better that they should be made on Phillipa, whom he did not care about, than upon some more sympathetic creature. He was filled with curiosity about Phillipa, and he had the right to be. She was the closest resemblance he had ever met to the almost extinct type of thorough-going full-blooded villainess. It was now almost a vow that she should fall in love with him. He was quite impatient to see how she would react to emotion; or could she feel emotion at all? That it would only be of the most animalic kind he was certain. Phillipa appeared to him incredibly superficial. But Christyn's anger disturbed the pleasure he could have had. It almost made him wish he could give up the experiment; the fun was rather spoilt. Her attitude troubled him now, and he began wondering whether she had not been right in some degree. At all events he had become self-conscious about it and thoroughly half-hearted. He wished Phillipa with the devil, and that behaviour could be an abstract thing instead of a measure of personal character.

Later, during the afternoon, Phillipa called on him. She found him preoccupied and pensive, pacing the floor of the studio.

"Eh, Neilson," she drawled, "he is upset. How nice for me. Now I have the chance to console 'im."

He laughed shortly and shook her hand. "Surely not," he said.

Then, remembering Christyn's outburst, he raised her hand to his lips. He would not be bullied. No one should be allowed to bully him, said his Conscience. So the next instant Phillipa was placing a flower in his buttonhole. His instinct was to turn away in disgust, to push her off; as he could not do

that, his face hardened, his mouth twisted, and into his eyes came a far-seeing expression.

"Neilson," she inquired with humorous softness, "what is it?"

His hand closed tightly over her wrist and held it firmly. Never had she seen his eyes so stern. It seemed that he was fighting for self-control, that he did not want to give himself away. It would have been better for them both if the far-seeing eyes had held a vision of his Lady of the June morning. But the vision that came to him now was one of Christyn of that afternoon, the Christyn with the contemptuous, haughty sneer and sharp tongue.

"Neilson!" The voice was a trifle pathetic. The hand stole up to his cheek. He started, but he was too late. She was gazing up into his face, the face that, she believed, had hardened on her account. But gradually his mouth drew to one side again.

"I had garlic for lunch in a Soho restaurant," he said flippantly—then immediately regretted it.

Slowly her arms dropped to her sides. She hung her head, disappointed.

"I had thought . . . I deecn't un'erstan' . . . your face . . ." she faltered. Then, shrugging her shoulders, began to laugh; she laughed, laughed, and laughed.

"Leesten. Yesterday I receive a proposal of marriage from a old Englishman. So ridiculous I nearly laugh then as I laugh now. But if he ask me again, I will not laugh so much."

"Indeed," said Neilson, biting his lip. He was cross with himself.

"You un'erstan'?"

"Why, I take it literally. There is nothing difficult to understand."

"If he ask me, I marry the Englishman," she said significantly. "I have ask your advice."

"Don't take my advice by any means. You must do as you feel," he said coldly, with a kind of inward disgust at himself.

"He is very kind and he love me and will give me anything."

In spite of himself, Neilson was filled with pity for her. He hated himself more than ever before. He loathed himself. In that moment he was mentally so humbled before Christyn that he almost liked Phillipa. If Christyn had not spoken to him about Phillipa, this might not have happened. Why should Phillipa pay for Christyn's warning? If only Christyn had not been justified! He had set out to punish Phillipa for her treatment of Christyn without Christyn's consent; and now he was punishing himself. He had not realized until the last moment that he could not rebuff a woman without feeling discomfitingly swinish. He had been fencing with her, and suddenly she had picked the button off his foil and invited him to stab her. He was in honour bound to allow her to win now, for he could not fight with an unfair weapon and retain any of his self-respect.

After all, Phillipa was brave too, in her own way. She had taken his blow, full in the face, without flinching, when any other woman would have burst into tears. There, in her face, the blow he had inflicted still showed, interpreted to him by the pallor of her cheeks. He had struck her with his buttonless foil, struck her . . . struck her . . . contemptible swine . . . struck a defenceless animal that had come to lick his hand, full of quite forgivable animal vanity, animal sensuality. . . .

Full of pity he held out his arms, took the poor

animal to his heart and tenderly kissed the imaginary blow, while there came to him then an overwhelming, suffocating adoration for the absent Christyn.

"Oh, Neilson," sighed Phillipa. "What you do? What you do?"

Neilson took her hand and kissed it repeatedly. "Forgive me," he said, "forgive me, Phillipa. Not for kissing you, because you wanted me to kiss you, but forgive me for not having kissed you at once. Forgive me for having made you believe that I would kiss you at once, for having hesitated. I ought to have risked a rebuff from you rather than have waited."

"Oh, Lor-rd, how thoughtful of you," she replied, drawing her hand away with a short laugh. "But, Neilson, I would not 'ave rebuff you. Perhaps you know that? And that I will never rebuff you?"

"Forgive me," said Neilson, with tremendous simplicity, "for having made you love me."

"You do not want me to love you?" she said, slightly stung.

"No one," said Neilson miserably, "will be the happier for loving such a vagabond as I am. I am worthless and utterly unworthy of any woman."

Phillipa squared her shoulders. "Neilson, you are the first man who has ever made me feel that I have not always been fair to peoples. You make me feel so different; I want to be . . . to be . . . sweet, perhaps. . . ."

"Don't say that. It makes me feel mean." He could not bear it.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, and shaded her eyes with her hand. "You mean that—never . . . ?"

"Phillipa, you must realize what I am. You must

not think of such things. We have flirted. That is the end."

Slowly she raised her eyes to his. "That is what conventional peoples says."

"I say it, Phillipa."

"Because you do not want me to make a sacrifice. But," she looked up with a smile, "I shall not make a big sacrifice, and we will cheat the world!" and she laid her head on his shoulder.

"I don't understand," said Neilson, "or else . . ."

"You needn't," she broke in, half closing her eyes serenely.

Neilson was exasperated. Somewhere, up in the clouds, or at the other end of the room, there existed another Neilson, looking on smiling, approving, or disapproving.

"Never mind," said this Other Fellow, "everything is experience."

The Spectre seemed to follow, direct, analyse every movement he made, every idea he conceived.

"Finish this now!" It said. "Get this scene over, get it over, get it over at all costs! Put her off, get rid of her. Make it To-morrow. To-morrow is another day."

Was he a lunatic that he could not control his mind or his actions? On the morning after Honor's dance, this dual brain of his had existed in much the same way. His behaviour ran completely riot, and his common sense seemed to look on in quite a cynical fashion, totally unable to influence it. There appeared to be no relation between his impulses and his reason. He was constantly horrifying his reason; his impulses were too strong for it, and made him totally irresponsible for his conduct.

"You are not doing the right thing at all," this

Other Fellow continued, "you know you are making a mess of things. Get out of it."

"Oh, damn," exclaimed Neilson desperately, and sat down with his jaws cupped in his hands, staring before him, almost on the verge of angry tears.

"Neilson," said Phillipa in a voice satiated with tragedy, "do not be so desperate or I shall not want to live. I shall find a way to be happy."

He was too sick at heart even to reply. Oh, damn, damn, damn.

"I wish I were dead!" thought Neilson consciously.

"Yes, I wish you were dead, you fine genius!" mocked that ghost of his soul. "You would be better dead. But you are not going to die for a long time yet. You know perfectly well you are not."

Phillipa touched his shoulder. "Why don't you talk?" she asked. "You are so wrapped up in your own thoughts. Of what are you thinking? Tell me."

"What a child you are," smiled the Other Fellow. "You want to blurt out the truth to her, but you shall not. Lie to her, to get rid of her."

So Neilson kissed Phillipa's hand for want of words.

"Neilson, we love, and that is beautiful!" she said.

He sprang up. "No, no, no!" he exclaimed wildly. "It is not love with you, it is some other thing. As for me . . ."

There was something terrible in the way he was not responsible for his utterances. Phillipa seized his arm and shook it, beginning to cry. The tears ran down her cheeks and she did not speak. Now he was dreadfully aware of her sincerity and the devil's bog he was in.

He took her in his arms and stroked her hair. He kissed her wet cheeks and lips in the effort to console her. He pressed her head against his breast and rocked her to and fro.

"Christyn! Christyn!" laughed the infernal Other Fellow.

Neilson gulped, and his eyes smarted.

"Oh, dear!" she finally gasped, taking out her handkerchief and blowing her nose.

Then at last they were interrupted; the studio bell rang, and they sprang apart with a sudden sense of reality. Neilson self-consciously seized a book and Phillipa sat down some distance away from him.

It was Aline St. John. She entered the room, and Phillipa turned her back on her, starting to powder her face.

Neilson greeted her effusively, coming up to her with a totally inconsistent warmth of welcome.

Then Phillipa held out two fingers to her.

"Sit down, Sparrow," said Neilson, feeling incredibly tall.

"I can't stay long," she replied, subsiding into an armchair in an attitude of complete repose, with one foot on the fender.

"It's been raining," she announced, "and my feet are wet, and by all the rights of comfort you ought to have a fire."

She contemplated her foot sulkily. It was too big. Also her shoes were not smart enough. She needed a new pair of shoes. No, she must have a new pair of evening slippers first. If she could have some black satin ones and have her silver ones cleaned properly.

She addressed Phillipa sleepily: "How can one really get the tarnish off silver shoes?"

"You can't nowadays," said Phillipa.

"Why 'nowadays?' " asked Neilson, or, it appeared to him, his voice.

"How in the old days?" asked the Sparrow.

"Once upon a time there was sold a wonderful stuff," Phillipa informed them, "but you cannot receive it now."

"Oh?"

"No. It was called 'Clarex' and was a kind of silver liquid, but as it contain a ter-rible—quite deadly poison, the Government has forbid it to be sold."

The Sparrow looked up. "'Clarex'? I don't think it's so wonderful. Is it really deadly poison? I didn't know that, or that it isn't on sale any more. I've got half a bottle left. S'pose I'd better hang on to it, though my silver shoes are past the stage of being revived with stuff like 'Clarex.' "

Thus ran one of Life's little tragedies. The Sparrow was going to dance to-morrow evening. The Sparrow desired to be desirable. It was not because of the tarnished silver shoes themselves that she was unhappy. It was because of what they signified. They were soiled, and she could not clean them, neither could she afford to buy new ones. Her beastly life was in the same sort of mess; there seemed no possibility of clearing it up, somehow, nor could she break away and start afresh. Money, money, money. Damned, damned money. Poison to clean her shoes with. Wasn't it typical? "Clarex" was only really a paint; it was not a cleanser. The whole subject took an allegorical air for her. It was Phillipa who suggested "Clarex." It was as though there lay a message for her in it. "Paint your soul with something that glitters, with poison if necessary, and it will appear unspotted and unspoil." Oh, Neilson,

Neilson! Why had he never lost that spark of guilelessness which was now eradicated from her? He could help her, and only he. She loved him so much, she needed him so.

To her great relief, Phillipa rose and bade them adieu.

She had barely left the room when the Sparrow faced Neilson with the words: "Neilson, I've got to talk to you."

"Certainly," he said, but he was horribly strung. His fingers played nervously with the lapels of his coat.

"Neilson, we're friends, aren't we?"

"Of course, of course."

The Sparrow sat down opposite him and gazed down at her finger-nails. Now it was her turn to be embarrassed.

"There was once a time when . . . when we were more than just friends. . . ."

He frowned and closed his lips furiously.

She continued: ". . . When you allowed me certain privileges, and I . . . I was yours in every sense that I could be. . . ."

"I hoped that was all over!" he cried out, irritated and nervous beyond control.

The Sparrow's chin and forehead grew pale. Her lips began to tremble. "I came to you because I need you with every atom of me. I am yours entirely. I need you, I need your touch and the sight of your face and your tenderness."

"I am desperate," replied Neilson with fierce deliberation, "because you talk like this. I thought you understood our attitude to each other. It was never love, and I knew it was never love, and so did you. Our later friendship was finer than the almost

physical emotion that first attracted us to each other."

"Oh, Neilson," she pleaded, "you can't say that. I loved you. I was astounded at my own intensity. You thrilled me, you made me feel . . ."

"Oh, be quiet!" he cried, "and don't talk of love to me. I never thought it was love. I'm half out of my wits because I'm so sick of myself. Love, love . . . I'll tell you all about love now. Then it was like looking for it in the grass instead of flowers; in sense while it was in spirit; in passion while it was in tenderness; in desire while it was in reverence. I looked for it in mouths, and all the time it shone in eyes. Good Lord, what a fool I've been! Friendship, such as a child feels for its playmate, is the preface to the book of love, and passion is an epilogue. Darned fool that I've been, I have always read the book back to front, starting from the end, to find the story hollow and to awaken with a sense of disenchantment. My dear Sparrow, forgive me, but heaven help me, I have become a worse fool than I was before."

"Neilson," said the Sparrow, having risen and stumbled to the door, "good-bye."

"Good-bye," replied Neilson, and dropped his head in his hands.

So she left him, and he flung himself down, utterly exhausted.

CHAPTER XIII

STUDIO SUPPER

LONG live the Studio! Neilson, Gaby, and Parnell.

Long live the studio with its thick smoke of Neilson's Virginian cigarettes, of Parnell and Gaby's good Turkish ones, of silly little Drayton's perfumed ones, of Sol's good cigar, of Banny's pipe.

Sol and Banny and Drayton and a Russian sculptor with a squashed nose, who is brought by Parnell, are our guests to-night. Just one of our many intimate little gatherings. Arranged by Parnell, this particular one; so Parnell takes the credit for its success. What else but success with such a group of fine young men? Not a nonentity among them.

Sol is hilarious, and at supper poured a glass of wine into his soup; and Terry, who was tipsy at the time, subsequently ladled some soup back into Sol's wine-glass. But Sol is not in the least drunk; one does not get drunk on so little light wine, only jolly. It is only the atmosphere.

Banny Lodder has taken offence to Drayton's salmon-coloured tie and has undone it. Not drunk either. But somehow Banny dislikes the kind of man who could ever wear a salmon-coloured bow tie. Prejudice, perhaps; but it would please him to feel its wearer's nose under his fist. Such a delicate, long nose has Drayton, with a skinny high bridge to it. It would become even as the Russian's. Banny fingers his own

nose analytically. Just there, on the slippery bit . . . crack, the gristle would go. . . .

Good-naturedly, Drayton is talking across to Neilson. Pretty little Drayton, so scented and lady-like, and even-tempered.

"You and your perfumed cigarettes!" chaffs Neilson. "Don't you know yet that perfumed cigarettes contain the worst tobacco? Bad tobacco drowned in scent."

"Oh, Gaby, why do you let him?" mournfully teases Parnell.

"I . . . I was given them, dash it all!" Drayton defends himself, laughing. "Shut up, Neilson."

"No *man* gave you perfumed cigarettes!" Sol attacks him.

"And who's the idiot of a woman who thus misguides you?"—this from Gaby.

Neilson informs as if in a dream: "The Sparrow."

Yes, it is the Sparrow. Silly Drayton, the Sparrow's toy, smokes the perfumed cigarettes she gives him. What a joke.

"Sparrow came here this afternoon," returns Drayton with a laugh that seems to add: "So there!"

"Fancy that now!" remarks Banny.

Solterre shakes his head. "Drayton," he says with gloom, "I should like to spell your name with a small 'd.'"

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. It'd suit you."

"That's enough," orders Neilson, sitting up.

"We're a gang of sadists."

"No, we're not," replies Banny quickly. "He's not suffering a bit."

"Dostoievski's 'Idiot,' don't you know," Solterre

explains with continued gloom. "Don't be a prig, Neilson."

"Oliver Goldsmith," says Gaby, waving a manicured hand, "perfect genius, and perfect—er—child."

"Parsifal!" booms Parnell, for a climax.

"Parnell!" cries Neilson. Whereat foolish Parnell looks at Neilson quickly; and all of a sudden he understands, and the laughter sticks in his throat like a cough.

Neilson leans across to him and whispers. "They would be horrified if they suddenly discovered he was a girl. And that's all he is, really. A girl in a man's body."

At Neilson's words the Russian, who has listened all this time in silence, looks up.

"Inhibition of the thymos gland," he remarks gravely. "I have a friend—a physiologist. He explained these things to me." And he lapses into reverie again.

Silence in the studio; the puffing of cigarettes. Someone breaks it.

"But really," Drayton is saying, "I know that Sparrow came to see Neilson this afternoon." He giggles. "I know, because she put on her best new hat for the occasion."

"Ah!" says the Russian sculptor reminiscently, tilting back his chair and sucking at his cigarette—he smokes yellow Russian cigarettes—"Ah, that reminds me of the time when I was in Rome. There was a little woman there. . . ."

Yes, that reminded him.

"She was repenting in an old church when I saw her first. She soon stopped repenting, however, in spite of my broken nose. Pretty, you know, but . . . she used to want to be my model, and though it's all

very well to be pretty, it was hardly possible after the life she had led. More skin, her prettiness, than shape. Now, when she put on her best hat, I used to know it was a sign that she wanted a new one. Psychology ran so: ex-best hat so shabby that she must have a new one. And I usually got it for her. You see, we were very happy. She was wanting to be good and I wanted to live my ideals. It was my nihilist period, you must know. Anti-Christ, anti-discipline, anti-law, especially anti-marriage and convention of any kind. Here was someone who would share with me. Passively, perhaps, but at least she consented—so long as I kept her well supplied with what she wanted. Especially hats, when she wanted them. She had a passion for hats, that girl. I must have got her at least four, and it only lasted five weeks. One day I see her in her latest hat. 'No, really,' I say to her, 'no more hats. My allowance from home has stopped.' She flares back at me: 'Very well, no more from you!' Ah well! Again she began repenting of her wicked life. I remember she cried and said what a Magdalene she was. She went off to confess—in her new hat."

"Priceless!" chuckled Banny.

"My first *aventure*. Free love etcetera. As Van Gogh says in his letters: 'The prostitutes are our sisters. Artists and prostitutes are, of necessity, in the same category.' The woman who could share my freedoms and all that. New hats."

"Was that your first experience?" asked Drayton.

"It was."

"Not as bad as mine," said Neilson. "Mine was a complete sell. Enough of a sell to make a man a misogynist for the rest of his life."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Gaby and a friend in Paris with a damsel each, but I was told I was too young. Dammit all, I was seventeen. I wanted an adventure as I wanted nothing else on earth. So one night when they were off, I betook myself to a café, with a beating heart. I was going to have an affair on my own, wasn't I just! I sat down, and soon enough a veiled houri joined me. She beckoned so mysteriously and I followed her. When she unveiled, damned if she wasn't the ugliest old crow a man had ever set eyes on. Fifty if she was a day. Lord, how my heart sank!"

"He-he!" laughed Sol, who had heard the tale before.

"Oh, I say! Did you go through with it?" asked Banny, smitten with pity.

"No, damned if I would. I threw her a few francs and ran for my life. Dangerous way of behaving that, but I risked it. I was deeply unhappy, and I wanted to cry. It was to be my first adventure."

They all laughed. Drayton laughed too, but somehow it did not strike him as funny. He pictured a dreadfully lonely, tempestuous youth who, left to his own devices in Paris, wanted to taste of what he had read too much about. And he had done something for which he could only be laughed at. Laughter, always laughter. What was it in these tragedies that others always wanted to laugh at? For instance, the others laughed at him and the Sparrow, all except Neilson. And they laughed about Neilson at this moment; all except Drayton. The same people laughed at the same things.

"How strange," he said aloud, "how strange it is that most men's first love affairs end in a minor key."

"I don't call Neilson's a minor key," laughed

Solterre. "I call it a discordant jazz note. Yes, jazz, ragtime!"

"I should have said that they end pessimistically," Drayton corrected himself. Then he added with a sigh, thinking of himself and the Sparrow: "Sometimes strange things happen."

"Queen Anne is dead," said Banny solemnly.

This time Drayton understood. Teasing, this was. But he only flushed a little and remarked with extraordinary mildness: "How clever you are!"

Banny said nothing after that. For some reason he had not expected the pink-collared, pink-tied little runt to retaliate at all. It made him feel rather silent. Banny had not really meant to bully. Surely Drayton had a tongue in his head. But, uncomfortably, he no longer had a desire to punch his nose. Banny had once seen a young girl answer her father in the same spirit of mild, frightened annoyance. He wished Drayton would only swagger a little; do something that could make one hate him. One could not hate a wretched insect. And he would have liked to hate Drayton.

"I'm still having my first adventure," Drayton was saying, apologetically, with a puzzled frown.

"You've been having it for the last three years!" replied Gaby.

"Yes," mused Drayton, "on and off. I was her first lover, and we lived together, secretly, for three months. Then she met Parnell, and left me. Then she dropped Parnell and came back to me. And then she met Neilson and became his friend, and she's been fretting ever since. I don't know what I am to her," he complained, "she always comes back to me when there is nobody else, but that's not a life. I'm

good enough when there's nobody better; better than nothing. Good enough to help her not to starve."

"Oh, Drayton, you fool!" moaned Parnell, hitting himself on the forehead.

"Why don't you marry her?" asked Solterre.

"She won't," Drayton shook his head.

"Who is this?" asked the Russian, waking up.

"Aline St. John," answered Drayton wearily, "the black-and-white artist."

"Lord!" exclaimed Neilson. "You're a fine one, Drayton."

Banny was relieved to find an excuse for the mental nose-punching.

Gaby smiled. "You are young," he drawled. "My dear Drayton, you ought to have suggested the Sparrow's identity, not given it away so straightforwardly. That would have been the honourable thing to have done."

"That Sparrow isn't worth all this," stated Parnell, "she is just flotsam. Nothing will ever be made out of her. I know, because I tried to make something out of her myself, thinking Drayton was too weak. They are all alike." He grinned suddenly. "If you want any more reminiscences to-night, I'll tell you about the only love affair I ever had. It was in Milan, some fourteen years ago——" his eyes vaguely sought the ceiling—"and her name was Christina."

Neilson lifted his head. Oh, yes, of course Christyn existed; and he pictured her, and told himself he loved her. . . .

"She was in the chorus at the Opera, and had a pretty good voice, too. I met her through a young friend of mine, an Italian piano teacher, and we became great chums. But she was just as frightened

of me really as she would have been of a bandit. She was a good girl then, that is why she was in the chorus, and she thought I had dangerous intentions. Well, I had and I hadn't. I fell crazily in love with her, and I think I would have married her, only she never let me get that far. She had some sort of idea that she could be a *prima donna* one day, and perhaps she wanted to save herself for the man who'd make her one. But on the other hand she was attracted by me, I can't say why, quite . . ."

"You weren't so bad-looking," interrupted Gaby, with a yawn.

"So in the end, she consented to do without the marriage tie. Her ambitions were so mixed. One day she would want to be a Cleopatra. Just throw everything over for love. Then it would be a great career she wanted, and she'd vex herself for days, practising scales and glad-eyes. Then she'd suddenly get sweetish, and just want a home and babies. And another time it would be wealth she'd be wanting. She happened to know different men, who tallied with her moods. There was one impresario who seemed to give her hopes in the *prima donna* line, and she had him well up her sleeve. For the other moods I suppose I sufficed. She was genuinely fond of me, and only her ambition stood in the way of unconditional surrender. Drayton, my child, you are not the only fool on earth. I wish we could do the obvious. Do you realize we never do the obvious for fear of being thought conventional, whereas the obvious is invariably the most original thing to do? The obvious thing would have been for me to have asked her: 'Is it me you want, or a career?' Or to have asked myself whether it was her I wanted, or the salvation of her morals. . . ."

"Yes, that's just it!" cried Drayton excitedly. "One doesn't care a rap about their morals; one doesn't care about anything. One's used to their company. Habit, I suppose, so that one doesn't imagine life without them. It's not passion. I wish it were. Passion is noble, and that dreary affection isn't."

"Oh, but I didn't feel a dreary affection for Christina, I assure you," Parnell went on, smiling gently. "Hm, by Jove, it wasn't that. But I came to the conclusion that it was her company I wanted, not her virtue. Naturally I soon found out that she was carrying on with the impresario, not to the limit, however. She had only begun to flirt. You should have seen her when she discovered that I knew. She threw herself at my feet and howled like a beaten child. Her red hair was spread out on the floor, she bowed her head so low. I couldn't quite understand her temperament. I wasn't in the least cross or superior. I tell you I just couldn't understand. To me it appeared that her flirting was the offence that should be forgiven, not the fact that she was found out. But to her, being found out was a sin. Poor kid. Another time she really went off with someone else for a couple of days. It wasn't lechery. It was just that conflict of ambitions and the lust of being a leading lady in one way or another. I put up with it philosophically; she was incorrigible. But she . . . " here Parnell cleared his throat and scratched his head to hide some sort of emotion. "She," he said with forced casualness, "she went and did something most awfully foolish. She went and died."

A silence. Then——

"Awfully clever, you mean." This from Gaby.

"No, he's right : foolish," said Neilson. "Because

she made a tragedy of it by dying, and it would have been merely an episode in his life if she had gone on living."

"Yes," Solterre said, thoughtfully, "I suppose Neilson's right. She would have done a fade-out from your life."

Parnell threw back his head like a horse, and laughed, shortly. "Oh, yes, I dare say. But that would have been less . . . less . . ."

"Romantic," suggested Banny.

"Yes, I think romantic is the word. I confess to liking romance. Our Russian friend will sneer, perhaps. Perhaps, as Gaby says, she was clever to have died. She would have got fat, and her hair would have got thin and the colour of a spring carrot. One doesn't like to see flowers fading. She was just a flower, swayed by different breezes, but the root of her affections was planted in me, and no wind could really waft her away—until she was plucked."

It was becoming quite melancholy in that studio now. Banny was feeling almost uncomfortable. Solterre's thoughts were very far away, and the Russian kept silence. Only Drayton found comfort in Parnell's story. Yes, it was like that, after all, with him and the Sparrow; except that you could hardly apply the epithet "flower" to the Sparrow. But that did not matter, it was just the same. She loved him deepest in the long run.

"Pretty," said Gaby, at last. "Very pretty. That kind of metaphor really belongs to Neilson. Worthy of Neilson."

"Only you shouldn't have said 'plucked,' " added Banny. "It reminds one too much of 'Varsity exams."

"How afraid of your emotions you all are!"

exclaimed the Russian suddenly. "You take everything so seriously, and discuss so lightly, out of sheer fear that one might not respect you. We, on the other hand, take things so lightly and talk of them so seriously—from love affairs to revolutions. We magnify our emotions deliberately, in order to learn from them. You gaze at yours from the wrong end of an opera-glass for fear of seeing too closely. Life is not so important as we make it, but Life is more important than you live it."

"Therefore," answered Parnell, "one should do as I do—become a Stoic. Learn to do without emotional luxuries."

"Some Stoic! bejabers!" Neilson could not help smiling.

"Where does that come into our Russian friend's theory?" asked Solterre, who was more interested in the sculptor's opinion than he cared to show.

"I suppose it follows that if you have no emotions at all," Neilson explained, "you need never be afraid either of magnifying or minimizing them, thus incurring the displeasure of no one—either Russian or English."

"Who considers anyone else's displeasure sufficiently important to model his life on such ascetic lines?" asked Gaby in a cavernous voice.

"Oh, we all do!" the Russian answered, "and there comes a time when aloofness is so far from being ascetic as to be purely hedonistic."

Neilson pointed to Solterre. "To wit, old Sol. Sol is no ascetic."

"Neilson," said Solterre, taking a deep breath, "if you think you are going to enlarge to-night's history of love affairs with a contribution from me, you are darn well mistaken."

"Can't we have one from you?" Neilson questioned innocently. "Why are you so averse to unbuttoning?"

"Because, my friend," Solterre's little grey eyes were sharp as pin-points, fixed on Neilson's, "I simply haven't got one."

Neilson merely laughed. The pin-points disappeared, and Solterre's previously dramatic physiognomy took on an air of pathetic childishness.

"I say, do you realize that's true? You knew it, didn't you?"

No, thought Neilson, it had never occurred to him. But he supposed it was true. Those boyhood flirtations with one Miss Vivyan Tempest and Lettice Tenby, his intimate friendship with Honor Pembroke, and now his affection for Christyn savoured of the purest, most perfectly virginal chastity. He raised his eyebrows, and quite sadly Solterre nodded. Then Solterre flushed with annoyance, and wriggled in his armchair. But oh, Neilson loved his friend dearly, and perhaps more than ever. Bejabers! and Sol was twenty-five years old!

And Banny? No, of Banny's few innocuous adventures Neilson knew, for he had been present at the first and he had Banny's confidence. Banny was an infant still. In Paris there had been a little member of the Russian *corps de ballet* whom he took out to supper twice, and who afterwards sighed about *ces Anglais!* and here in London a delightful widow, a member of Neilson's menagerie since then (the Squirrel, by the way), had pursued him more or less unsuccessfully. About five or six months ago, this. Oh, God bless that Banny! In a studio, the nearest imitation to a Bohemian any British baronet could attain; in Paris, such a cheery good soul. And yet

at Fantenden or Barthone it was horses and shoot'n and fish'n and beasts in general, with a pipe in his mouth and his hands deep in the pockets of his plus-fours. Honor said of him: "I adore Banny. He is a dear, good child. A perfect chameleon, and still such a bore, the poor darling!" There was something appallingly normal about Banny, that was it. He had just the right amount of every virtue and every vice to make him perfectly normal. Neilson gazed at him with thoughtfulness. Nice boy. Yet not fastidious like Sol. But Drayton's voice interrupted his rambling.

"Neilson, I think I had better get back. I don't know if the Sparrow's waiting up for me."

Sparrow? mused Neilson. Sparrow and Drayton? Poor Drayton. Poor Sparrow. Sparrow the philandering lover, and Drayton the unhappy clinging vine. Put Drayton in skirts; as for the Sparrow, she would recapture a certain amount of charm in trousers. . . .

Drayton was shaking hands with him now. Shaking hands with everybody like a well-behaved child. Parnell saw him to the door. It was only a quarter past twelve, but he would not stay. After that they trooped to the kitchen and made some tea and toast, which they ate as though they were really hungry. They discussed Drayton, and to the Russian was fully explained the reason for poor little Drayton's depression. Neilson explained particularly. He must see it was difficult because the Sparrow was still so infatuated with Neilson, but Drayton did not realize to what extent.

At half-past one Gaby said he was going to bed; rehearsal to-morrow. And then Solterre and Banny went home in Solterre's car. But the Russian sculptor

stayed on until half-past three, smoking Parnell's cigarettes, and telling anecdotes. Phillipa, the Sparrow and Christyn were carefully locked in a little compartment at the back of Neilson's head.

CHAPTER XIV

HONOR AND CHRISTYN

CHRISTYN and Honor sat one afternoon in Honor's sitting-room in Hertford Street.

Honor's coolness no longer deceived Christyn; long, lithe Honor whose hands were white and narrow and an inch longer than anyone else's; hands like an ascetic's, but with little betraying cushions on the palms and that subtle air of super-sensuousness that told Christyn a lot. Everything was elongated in Honor, hands and neck and limbs, like a modern fashion-drawing. Stretched on a rack; and to Christyn it seemed that her mind was the same.

To-day Honor was restless to the point of subdued hysteria. The two had finished tea and now talked of intimate things with that strange feeling of immense distance that invariably overcame them when they were left together; an intense longing to know each other utterly, but the uncomfortable fear that they never would. Honor had proclaimed strange new doctrines to Christyn. She had been reading certain new books on the psychology of sex, and they had given her brain too much exercise. Christyn's "goosiness" appeared to make her impatient.

Honor was now in favour of the abolition of marriage, and had some Platonic ideas about the abolition of the family.

Suppression was the root of all evil. Conventions meant suppressions.

"Nature," she said, "has already left us too many obsolete things and we've still got a lot of her limbo to clear away. In an animal, the tail is a useless relic; with us, who are further away from Nature already, the old idea of the mother with her children around her is as unnecessary as the tail. It is a quaint idea that the child-machine should, of necessity, have sufficient mental development to educate, or supervise the education of other human beings."

Sublimation was the substitute for suppression.

Honor talked on and she talked with the conviction that comes when one means more than one says, because one is aiming at some definite thing. Honor quarrelled with her mother freely.

Across Christyn's soul was written the name "Neilson" and she was filled with a sense of futility and of great sadness. She had been listening to Honor and in a great many things Honor had said she found solutions to her own problems. But other things worried her :

"It's caddish of women to let men be in love with them, to let them kiss them, dream of them, to rouse them. Girls like that are worse than harlots. They create more cases for the nerve-specialists than anyone knows."

The book on psychology she was reading said . . . And so on.

Did Neilson dream of her, desire her? Was she harming him, harrowing him? Oh dear! What a sordid world this was. She could be content to go on loving Neilson for ever, and seeing him daily; only kisses, no more. Neilson had never kissed her. She

longed to be kissed. It was men who wanted marriage, mating, not young girls. Young girls were afraid. She was angry with him, and she wanted to punish him. "Neilson, Neilson, Neilson," sang her brain. She was absolutely in love, and he had been unkind to her. She would lash him. Nothing would come of this love; it was fruitless. Not marriage with a creature like Neilson, so her heart was going to break. But surely Honor had preached against marriage? Oh, why couldn't she go and just be always with him and love him and comfort him and be tender with him, and no more? Just love him? The nerve-specialists again. It was impossible. Grown-up people just didn't do that kind of thing. Honor had used the word "unhealthy." Well, if that was the end, it was his fault and she would make him feel it. It was his fault, the way he had made a mess of his name, and made love to odd women, so that Christyn could not marry him now, respectably in church. . . . Then the heroine in her said that if she really loved him, she would marry him for all his poverty and bad name . . . No, because he had shamed her with Phillipa. She would lash him, no, burn him, burn the memory of her into him, so it would hurt him to think of her, and then break away.

Life was so simple, yet one twisted one's brains into the oddest forms trying to plan, plan; things came differently from what one planned, after all, so why split one's head? Yet, all this splendid Wisdom failed to console one, failed miserably, unutterably, and the nightly twisting, sifting, and ruminating continued unabated. It was impatience, all passionate impatience to get on with Life, to see what would happen. Things would shape themselves, one knew, but one fretted oneself, nevertheless, wondering what

would be the shape, and trying to do the shaping oneself. Christyn had a vision of the past: Lord, how she had changed! The great four-post bed with the purple hangings at Barthone, and the excited child, loveless, and fancy-free, that lay in it, planning and shaping, already, the things that had not happened yet. That first night at Barthone. She hardly seemed the same person. It was all Francis then, Francis who, in the space of six months, had become Sol to her. The second night she had had innocent little day-dreams of Francis. And still, Banny was the nicest of them all; but one could not make lots of brain-pictures of Banny, she found. He was only one person—one personality; and she knew him so well.

Honor swept grandly on. The effect of religion on psychology.

Religion? thought Christyn vaguely. Religion was believing that people preferred to be pleasant rather than unpleasant. It meant that Something helped when one begged very fervently for help; that Something appreciated when one thanked with all one's heart. That Something loved one, looked down and pitied and was kind. Something—Christyn's God—was kind. It was the dear, beautiful Earth, the sky and the stars, but It went on inexorably. Above all, It helped; and It helped when one asked for other people. Christyn remembered how her mother had laughed at her when she had discussed the question with her at the age of fifteen. To Eleanor Barthone, God was an acquaintance whom one was polite to. It was bad manners to discuss people behind their backs; it was bad manners to discuss God. But with Christyn she discussed God because Christyn was her child and she was intimate enough.

"Dear child," she laughed, "God is much too busy to look after our personal little requirements."

"But, mummy, I think He is not so small that one can apply the term 'too busy' to Him. He is a King. He must have servants."

"Servants are inefficient deputies, my love, take it from me!"

"Then He protects one Himself."

Mummie had grown amusedly impatient. "Darling, don't be absurd, and do stop speculating on these things. You can pray to your tin God with the umbrella as much as you like if it makes you happy."

God made Lady Barthone uncomfortable. There was great laughter when the joke about the umbrella was repeated.

Honor suddenly dropped from the abstract into the personal. Christyn had not been listening to her, but Honor had not minded. She had been soaring, her own wounds, her own personal questionings hidden under the bandages of abstraction. She said "one says," "one feels," and "it is so," instead of "I say," "I feel," and "I think." The effect of religion on psychology—in general? Not at all. The effect of religion on me. Two volumes of Havelock Ellis are upsetting, I know they are, I am upside-down inside, but I am glad I am modern. I am a warrior of Modernity, so what is a little mental discomfort to me? Oh, God!

Hasn't it been hard enough to fight mother for that Bakst in my room? Haven't I set my teeth for my sociological opinions, for my books, for my friends at the studio? Mother and I travel by opposite roads in opposite directions. I have struggled for violent truth, freedom. Now, I struggle for freedom in all things,

I have fought for freedom of thought, of conduct, now I must fight for freedom in love. I must be right, I must, about that. One needs experience for everything else; why not for love? It is bad to suppress anything; then why suppress sex? I must be right, O God, let me be right! I am desperately idiotic if I am not right. And why can I never forget myself? I know myself inside out, to the point of lunacy. I am like a novel to myself, that has been read over and over again so that I have no impulses left and my dreams are stale. Everything is deliberate and I say to the woman in the novel: Fancy that now! every time I do anything that surprises me. I am self-conscious and I cannot lose myself.

"Honor, do you ever pray?" Christyn's voice.

"Yes. No. Sometimes."

"To what?"

"I dunno. Something. I dunno."

"How?"

"How do you pray?"

Christyn closed her eyes tightly and interlaced her fingers, straining, begging. "Like this, mostly," she said. "And you?"

"Like this, I think." Honor knelt on the settee and bowed her head. Her hands hung limply by her side.

"Do you really? Like that?" Christyn seemed surprised.

"It's graceful. It should please the Deity."

"Do you really think about how you look? Good Lord!"

"Yes, isn't it appalling? I always think. Tell me, who prays like this?" Honor folded her palms flatly against each other, and raised her eyes upwards with an air of serenity.

"A certain lucky type only," said Christyn. "One needs a special purity of mind which I haven't got, a certain inward peace."

"Yes, so I should imagine. Haven't you got inward peace?"

So the sweet little goo-goo was not as placid as she looked? Sweet child Christyn had her troubles too, had she?

"No, Honor, that's where we meet. You are in a turmoil, aren't you?"

"Don't say that. But perhaps I am. It's our age, you know. We're bound to grow out of it. We take ourselves so absurdly seriously, don't we? Let me see, you are nearly nineteen? Eighteen? What a brilliant babe you are. Tell me, have you been in love?"

"Yes. You?"

"Oh, Lord, kind of. When I was fourteen it was passion. Perfectly ghastly and horrible and sickly. Then I fell platonically in love with Bernard Shaw—at fifteen. I had dreams of George Bernard patting my head and discussing his plays with me and telling his old men friends: 'This child is a genius. She is different from other children.' Since I was seventeen I haven't lost my heart—except once, when I was rebuffed, so we won't talk about that."

"Poor Honor. I wish you weren't so . . . so . . ."

"What?"

"You are, without any reason, what I could be and am not."

"Tell me yours."

"Nothing much, Honor dear. I began to think so young and so gradually—I must have been eleven years old when I first understood romance. At four-

teen my music-master fell in love with me—I understood it too well. It harrowed me for a year——”

“Music-masters are a race apart; I don’t appreciate music. Well?”

“Oh, nothing, only it made me nervous and precocious. After that I was ready to fall in love with a door-post. Do you realize how I have been dragged up? London, New York, Buenos Ayres, Paris, Madrid, it’s incredible. And the influence of Phillipa, who talked filth at me with a smile. And the influence of mother who made me leave the room at fifteen if childbirth was mentioned—and then talked sex to me, also. Darling, irresponsible mother! But she was quite wide awake, you know. Once, in New York, an American woman got a crush on me. Mother saw her kissing me on the mouth, so she never came to the house again. Isn’t it awful?”

Honor shook her head. “But how unspoilt you are! I can’t believe it.”

“I’m not clever like you,” said Christyn, “that’s why I’m rather untouched and why I am so afraid of you.” It suddenly occurred to her to tell the truth: “You are so patronizing to me that I think I am not as silly as I think I am. I am cleverer than Sol, do you know?”

Honor looked at her in surprise. “Why, of course you are! And if I patronize, it’s shyness. You’re so far away from me that I’m terrified of you. There you seem to walk along in your mental crinoline, crying, ‘Touch me not!’ until I want to run away. You are all those things I can never be. Pure.”

“Honor, how silly! Why aren’t we friends?”

“What do you mean—aren’t we?”

“No. Don’t be an ostrich, Honor dear. And I’m not pure, I . . . I . . .”

"What?" Honor's eyes gleamed with something very much like hope.

Christyn seized Honor's hand and pressed it warmly. "Honor, you *understand*. You aren't happy; neither am I."

Honor returned her hand-pressure. Then she laughed and said: "Nice little early Victorian squeezes we give each other."

"Don't be so self-conscious," Christyn pleaded.

"Can't help it," Honor shrugged. "I'm like that."

Again the barrier was up, but Christyn blindly hit at it.

"Why are you unhappy?"

"Because I'm frozen. I can't fall in love any more. I've had to freeze myself and I'm frozen."

Surely the barrier was gone now for good and all?

"You're in love this minute, aren't you?" she continued.

Christyn looked down at her hands. "Yes," she murmured, "and I'm in a muddle because I ought to make a decision."

"Can you tell me?"

"I love someone and he loves me, but it's impossible—that's all."

"Oh, so usual!" Honor laughed. Then: "You've got to make it possible, Christyn my dear," she said tensely, "because you mustn't freeze too."

"Honor darling!"

"Christyn, you are sweet, you sweet little thing!" She kissed Christyn. But oh! that monster of self-consciousness. "Of course, this is perfectly sickly between two girls. If you read Havelock Ellis you'll . . ."

Christyn leapt up, and stamped her foot. "You idiotic girl!"

"Let me reciprocate: don't be an ostrich yourself. And don't call me 'an idiotic girl.' Have the courage of your convictions and call me an idiot!"

"But, Honor . . ."

"My dear, do face facts. It's subconscious, of course, but it's there all the same. There is no such thing as pure affection. I have read . . ."

"You're morbid, that's what you are, Honor. You read these unnecessary books and get to feel everything on your own skin. I'm fond of you and I refuse to have my normal affections put down to . . . to . . . beastly . . ."

"But, my dear, as if it mattered what you put anything down to! There—I'm demoralizing you. You're a dear baby, and I'm a wicked woman."

Crash! Down came the barrier again. Miles apart were Christyn and Honor.

Suddenly Honor flung herself on the settee, face downward on the cushions, and began to sob.

Honor sobbing!

"Oh, this icy brain, this frozen icy brain of mine! But I'm right although it hurts. I'm right! 'Eyes open' is my motto! Open your eyes, Christyn! Don't be old-fashioned and narrow-minded!"

"If you are right," said Christyn very quietly, kneeling beside the settee, "why are you crying?"

"Because I am lonely in my rightness! You're all blind and so I am lonely because I can see."

"I am going to open my eyes too," whispered Christyn in her ear, hand suddenly pressed to breast, "and you won't be lonely any more, Honor. Is that what you want?"

Honor looked up, raised on one elbow, her face

stained with tears. She wondered whether she looked pretty in her woe, then cursed her brain, and the awful self that never left her alone.

Christyn was solemn.

"Oh, don't, don't!" begged Honor's heart and soul. "Don't initiate such a sweetly foolish child into all this miserable modernism and self-analysis and introspection." But Honor's brain and impulse tossed the Conscience aside. "Open eyes!" it cried.

"Yes," said Honor aloud, "I want you to understand Life—as it's lived nowadays; Art, as it's understood nowadays, and Love as it's understood nowadays."

Honor, how can you be so selfish? Oh, but it's for the best, it is, really, really. And I must prove to myself that my God, my martyrs have not died in vain. It would be too cruel if they had. Oh, surely, surely my innocence, my purity, my peace of mind has not been sacrificed for nothing? My bliss has not perished that this wisdom should be futile? Experience! Hail! Christyn will join me to give me support. I must live for what I have died.

Christyn consulted her wrist-watch.

She rose, patted her hair, and smoothed her dress.

Honor sat up, dried her eyes, began to powder her nose and bite her lips.

"I must go," said Christyn, kissing Honor's hair.

"It's late, and I'm going out to-night."

"The Tempests' dance?"

"Yes, are you going too? What fun? Sol and I can fetch you." Christyn began to arrange her hat.

"About ten o'clock, then?" Christyn stood up.

"Well, good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, dear child. See you to-night."

"Good-bye. Don't cry any more. The barrier between us has gone."

"Remember, it's only our age—twenty-one and eighteen. In a few years we shall laugh over this."

Something in Honor's words made Christyn sad. "That doesn't help us in the least at the moment," she said, her hand on the door-handle. "A broken toy is a real tragedy at six."

Are they not foolish these modern people?

Neilson has his intuition well to the fore: it is his Other Fellow.

Christyn calls herself an actress and thinks herself unique.

Honor frets over her brain and has reduced self-analysis to a refined torture.

Are they not absurd these modern young things?

A few minutes later Honor was called to the telephone.

"Honor, is it you? Christyn still with you? No? Good. Something awful yet awfully funny has happened. This morning I was called urgently by Neilson. The Sparrow was nearly unconscious, Drayton wanted help. It really is awful, but funny all the same. Sparrow had swallowed half a bottle of shoe-cleaner in the attempt to commit suicide, but it only made her sick. The bottle was marked 'Poison' and she took it seriously. Ghastly for Neilson; everyone knows she is mad about him, did it on his account. Neilson is dreadfully upset. . . ."

"Sol, Christyn is fond of Neilson . . . you'd better let them be."

"Neilson isn't worth her shoe-button, blast him. He's nice and I'm devoted to him but he's only an unsavoury swine, after all."

"Don't, Sol, please."

"There'll be a scandal in our set now. He's mucked up."

"Who cares?"

"I do. He's not for her. He's just an ordinary Bohemian. Nothing marvellous."

"Oh, not ordinary. So divinely perverse."

"Don't get modern. 'Divinely perverse!'"

"Sol—don't tell Christyn about the Sparrow, there's a dear."

"Why?"

"Please don't. I'm civilizing her slowly. It would hurl her back to Victorianism with horror."

"All right, I won't if it's for that. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, Sol."

Oh, good-bye, good-bye. Sweet Christyn of the filmy white ball-dress in June, of the deep and narrow intensity, of the clear crystal wisdom, good-bye.

Good-bye, Honor. Poor troubled pioneer, so brave because you are really so full of terror.

Good-bye, Friend Sol. Sol, you are Christyn's cousin. You are pure like sea-water that is always pure despite its impurities, but you are powerless and selfish, so good-bye for the moment.

Good-bye to Neilson's good luck. The Sparrow's love augurs no good tidings.

But oh! break your hearts over Christyn if you will, for Honor is civilizing her.

CHAPTER XV

CHRISTYN AND SOLTERRE

CHRISTYN arrived home to find that Aunt Amelia had retired to bed with a headache and that Solterre was already in his bath. It quite alarmed her that circumstances should so soon give her the opportunity to put her new resolutions to the test. As she ran up to her aunt's room and knocked at the door she knew that she wanted to go to the 'Tempests' dance and, in that case, she must say so. There was the rub. It was going to be so awkward suddenly to cease being a child; it would hurt Aunt Amelia's feelings, or rather a sense of propriety which had been fattened and fostered into feelings. What a pity "feelings" were considered right and virtuous, so that people who did not possess a superabundance of them wore them like a mantle to cover an emotional poverty. Feelings were not a cloak, thought Christyn, they were part of one; and she wished Aunt Amelia would not keep up any pretences. There were certain vices, for instance, which could be turned to great good and were mercifully withheld from such women as Aunt Amelia merely by their being in the category of vices. Unfortunately "feelings" were not vices. "Feelings" ought to thrive only in spite of repression.

Thus thought Christyn as she wended her way

towards Aunt Amelia's bedroom. She knocked at the door.

"Dear," Aunt Amelia wailed, "we can't go to-night. And Vivyan Tempest's twenty-first birthday too! Francis will be so disappointed at having to go without us."

Christyn set her jaw. "I'm sorry you aren't well, auntie; we shall both hate leaving you. . . ."

("My God, I'm actually doing it!" she thought to herself.)

"Christyn!" From Aunt Amelia came a half-shocked, half-pathetic cry.

"M'm?"

"But I can't go, I tell you!"

"I'm so sorry, auntie dear." Christyn's heart was beating. It needed courage, this. "They are expecting me, at any rate, so I cannot disappoint them." Open revolt for the first time.

"Dear girl! Unchaperoned?"

"I went to Banny Lodder's unchaperoned, once. And there was a dance at Honor's that time I went to stay with her."

"But a dance like this, during the season!"

"That's hypocrisy. I'm going, auntie. Mrs. Tempest is surely sufficiently adequate a chaperone to her daughter's friends to make it safe!"

Aunt Amelia had a headache, so there were feeble arguments from Aunt Amelia, who hated thinking at all times; more than ever when she had a headache. And Christyn was so delightfully airy and matter-of-fact about going that it began to seem natural that she should. Honor would be there, alone. Alban Lodder and Sol would be there. Neilson would not be there. Sol was like a brother. They would fetch Honor and Banny on the way and drop them again on the way

home. Oh, let us be modern for once, it is so perfectly all right. All right. Aunt Amelia feels that it is difficult to make rules for a girl who is not her own daughter. She would be much stricter with her own daughter, but with a niece-in-law she might be accused of being hard and purposely disagreeable. People would say she was a spoil-sport to Christyn. Aunt Amelia cared terribly what people thought and more what they said; they might not notice that Aunt Amelia was not there, but if Christyn had to send a message and explain her own absence, they would discuss it. Moreover, Aunt Amelia had a headache, and it was so easy to allow Christyn to have her way. And who can resist easiness? What harm is there in going to a private dance unchaperoned? What a ridiculous thing to worry or quarrel over! It all suddenly seemed so utterly unimportant to Aunt Amelia. Perhaps it needs a headache to drive a little sense of proportion into a middle-aged Englishwoman who has no money troubles.

Christyn skipped down the corridor, immensely pleased with life, stopped before the bathroom door and knocked.

Solterre was singing; his voice rose, unsteady and spiral through the accompanying din of bath-water, sighing, choking horribly before its final exit down the waste-pipe. Like a soul in torment sounded that bath-water. Solterre sang bravely: "Parisian Pierrot."

"Parisian Pee-roh!
Society's He-roh!"

"Sol, you're horribly out of time! Ta-ta-tee-tee-ta—don't you *know*? Oh, by the way, I've got lovely news: I'm going to the 'Tempests' dance alone with

you; your mother can't because she's got a—— Sol!
Are you listening?"

"What's that?"

Christyn repeated her news.

"Poor mater—mother, I mean. Beg your Victorian pardon."

"Sol," whispered Christyn, her mouth to the crack of the door.

"Francis. Beg *my* Victorian pardon now."

"Sol, Sol, Sol," Christyn insisted softly, "I have something to tell you."

He did not say anything, so after a few moments' silence:

"I am not Victorian any more. Not any, any more."

A groan answered this piece of information.

"You're Victorian even to talk about it."

"Sol, do you remember one day this Spring when you begged me to stay old-fashioned?"

"At that time I thought you had an old-fashioned soul, which I felt would be a pity to destroy these days. But you were only a blasted hypocrite, darling. You're blinkered and held back and pigeon-holed like two million other flappers, but you're modern inside, all the same. So you'd better be honest about it."

"I don't know that I believe in showing oneself naked. . . ."

"Oo, we *are* getting modern! Funny sort of conversation to have through a bathroom-door, anyway!"

The key turned in the lock, and Solterre, very scrubbed and baby-faced, in a green silk brocaded dressing-gown, grinned at Christyn. The bathroom was full of steam. Just now Sol would smell of

lavender soap and talcum powder, rather like a baby. In ten minutes' time Sol would smell like a baby which had been too-much kissed by someone who smoked a great deal. In an hour's time he would have the aroma of a youth, by the end of the evening that of a man. He emerged.

"Do you know what I think? I think conventions and fashions are jolly good things. Unfortunately the temperamental people who need them most, break away from them first."

"You don't mean fashions, surely?"

"Yes I do. Do as the Romans do. Bobbed hair in a studio; kid gloves at the Tempests'. That's how I manage to enjoy life."

"I take the hint although I don't agree." Christyn inspected him. His nose was luminous from ablutions; his hair was nearly brown with oil, and almost flat—and so it would remain for half an hour. "I have other principles for success. Oh, well perhaps," she reflected, "they're unavoidable with me, but they're these: domesticated in a studio because the other women there are not. Victorian at Honor's because Honor is modern. Modern at Barthone because father is fusty. A baby with you because you patronize, and to Neilson all that is sweet and untouched. With Banny I flirt."

Solterre replied that this had nothing to do with her, but only with the people who surrounded her. He, himself, was not a Solterre at Barthone.

"The Tempests make me feel fast," she said; "father makes me Spanish."

"Honor Pembroke makes a puritan of me," said Solterre, inspecting his nails, then polishing them on the sleeve of his silk dressing-gown. The cuticle was rough and caught in the silk. "Ow," said Solterre.

Christyn said absently: "I am lonely. Because I am a fool and a dreamer, I am lonely, and because I sit on a throne and watch. I am a fish out of water at Neilson's studio—a fool. At Barthone a stranger—a dreamer among all you hearty people who love golf. Oh, a blessing on you all, by all means, but I am not of you. I am not a patriot and I am virginal, but I have no sense of virtue. I think I am as dull as ditchwater because I am so good, but I could be an adventuress—and am not one because I am too indolent."

Solterre frowned thoughtfully. "It isn't a matter of laziness with me, but of inclination," he said, "and I'm fastidious."

"We never see each other," said Christyn suddenly, "we wear masks all the time with each other, you and I. We never talk, we only speak to each other. We would quarrel if we didn't do that. It's odd."

"You're so funny sometimes," said Solterre, a trifle put out, "I could think you a *poseuse*. You behave as if you were a wonderful, mysterious personality whom no one knew anything about, whereas everyone knows all about you and everything you do and who your ancestors are, and everything."

"If you mean to tell me that the essence of charm lies in mystery," replied Christyn with a smile, "I agree with you. There are people who are interesting because one knows nothing about them, who lose their greatest charm when one even knows whose children they are. Then there are those who are amusing because one will never know them or what they think, even if one knows all about them. Then there are those who are romantic in all circumstances, even when one knows them inside out."

"You talk like Neilson!"

Christyn looked at him with blank surprise, the surprise of recognition, then she lowered her eyes to her wrist-watch.

"Time to dress," she said abruptly, "and besides you'll catch cold hanging around undressed after your bath."

Oh, of course, this was Francis, the old, somewhat mindless Francis whose good looks and amazing cleanliness had captured her long ago, six months ago.

"Jerusalem! how you've changed!" Solterre muttered, turning towards his bedroom door, opposite the bathroom. "So long!"

"I know what you want with me," Christyn remarked to herself, walking down the corridor; then continued to think: "You would love me to be callow and mindless because I should be so easy to deal with. When I was outwardly Victorian I was a crank; now I am a rebel like Honor. I ought to be hearty, you would love me then. I am a complete misfit everywhere."

Solterre thought of Christyn: "How peculiar you are! Can't you do anything normally? You are a highbrow, but too original, and I wish your clothes were more conventional. Also I wish I were not so moody myself. I don't mind crankiness and perversity in men, but I do love women to be healthy animals. I want to be comfortable, and yet Honor attracts me. But you fall between two stools. Life's funny."

And he speculated about Christyn while he dressed.

They dined alone together. Christyn wore an emerald velvet dress and felt adventurous. Solterre seemed happy and extremely pleased to be alone with her. Happy like children they were, children on the

spree. He was conscious of a new strangeness in her to-night; and in himself there was a restlessness that portended an interesting evening.

"In June, in this lovely England of yours," Christyn was saying, smoothing her dress happily, "it is quite all right to wear velvet."

They ate in silence for a time. It was a great, ominous silence, not dull at all. But Solterre felt that they were wasting time; moreover he was eating without tasting, eating hurriedly, excitedly. So he said something. He said:

"I wish I were in love."

"You are in love," Christyn answered, "but with no one. That sounds mad, but I'm sure it's possible. Think of it! June, and, for once, fine weather, age twenty-five and a half, good-looking, a title, and really as much money as you need. Of course you are in love. It's a pity there isn't an object on which to lavish the love, isn't it?"

"Oh, Christyn!" he laughed back, "how right you are! You've got such a nice imagination."

"Creative or sympathetic? Sympathetic, I think. There are two kinds, you see. The one soars away and finds new things, the other only understands everything." She wanted to add: "Neilson and I are two examples. He creates and I collect. There are enormous possibilities in me; I could, properly trained, be an ideal woman. He could, with the right surroundings, develop a perfect man's character."

Solterre answered, still laughing: "How different you are from what I thought you were the first time I met you."

"Oh, but I *have* changed, so it's not all your fault. And I'm going to go on changing—because I shall dress differently. Honor is making a modern girl of

me by degrees. You see, I believe in the effect of clothes upon character more than the effect of character upon clothes."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going shopping to-morrow. I'm going to buy myself several pairs of 'nude' silk stockings which will look as if they weren't there at all. I shall buy myself a pair of plain black, patent-leather pumps and a pair of creamy-yellow and a pair of tan ones. I shall wear a camellia in that part of my coat which ought to have a buttonhole, and a very small untrimmed hat. I shall buy myself a cherry-coloured lip-stick, not too bright because that would look common, and some 'day cream' to put on my face before I powder it. I shall polish my finger nails. I shall use a good scent—but not a flower scent. Something with a 'ping' in it."

Her eyes twinkled with mischief. "How can I possibly go on being Victorian when I look like that?"

"Amen. But don't look commonplace whatever you do!"

"No, because I shan't cut my hair, or wear shorter skirts than I do, nor will I make up my face in any noticeable way. I shall do less than the others do. You'll see!"

"You're going to be naughty!"

"Rather! And modern!"

Peals of laughter from both of them. This was that infant's idea of being modern. But then, Solterre was not really modern himself. Only Honor was that. The name of Honor haunted them both. She had a tremendous influence over them at that time.

A warmth of tenderness for Christyn and for Honor suddenly welled up in Solterre, overpowering, fierce,

coupled with what in German is known as *Weldschmerz*. What would life not do to these two girls whom he loved so? These two beautiful, precious friends who filled his thoughts? Coarsen them? Alter them? Weary them?

He had an impulse to take Christyn's hand and press it to his forehead. What a darling child she was now. It made him silent, this sudden, sexless passion.

Christyn caught the mood and returned it.

"Sol," she said, very softly, "we do get on with each other, don't we?"

"We promised we would," he replied. He leant across the table and squeezed her fingers. "You darling!"

"We," breathed Christyn, her heart beating with pride, "are the only really Platonic couple I have ever heard of. I love you so dearly, so very dearly, just as if you were my brother—*just . . .*"

"I adore you. Aren't we absurd? But I could be a girl and adore you in the same way. I think if I were your mother my attitude towards you would be just the same. You're right, we're a Platonic couple. And I didn't believe in them before. But it's me this time."

It was quite true of them. No spark of desire burnt in Solterre, no madness, only a wealth of affection. And in Christyn there sang a joy of Solterre that would have liked him to shrink to a size which would enable her to carry him in her arms, against her bosom, like a kitten.

How Honor would mock. This uncomfortable knowledge somewhat lessened Christyn's ecstasy. Honor was now the spiritual audience and critic to all her sentiments. It had never happened to her before;

that she should be guided in her behaviour, thoughts and tastes by someone who was not conscious of being her guide. She remembered, vaguely, that certain young girl-friends of hers, long ago, had been similarly anxious to make their conduct and ideas coincide with the beliefs and prejudices of their favourite authors. One did these things when one was very young. One followed a cult of sorts.

Alas, Platonic love of Solterre was not consistent with Honor and her interpretation of the psychology of sex! For the flicker of a second Christyn wondered whether her spasm of emotion had not been a little bit deliberate, a little bit eager; whether she had not seized an impulse with both hands, somewhat greedily, and nursed it.

No, surely not. She was sincerely fond of Solterre. With a sense of guilt she threw off the doubt; shook it from her as a dog would shake off water.

Dinner was over, and she stood up. They had been silent for a long, long time.

Solterre took her hand quietly and held it.

"This is perfect," he said.

"Sol, dear . . . we won't misunderstand ourselves ever again, will we? We know, now. You see, I am in love with someone else, in the ordinary way, and I'm not in love with you as I feared I was. I misunderstood myself. You must have known."

"Yes, I thought I had fallen in love with you, but it was never so. I have always loved you. I suppose I am an abnormal sort of chap, but I can feel like that. It's the same about Honor, exactly the same. Some day I shall lose my head thoroughly in the old-fashioned manner, but for the moment I'm not that way inclined."

And so Christyn was happy. She had tidied her state of mind about Solterre as one tidies a drawer, and banished all fear of Honor. Her attitude towards Solterre had always worried her until to-night. Fortunately, one never imagines one's drawers untidy again just after one has finished tidying them.

Calm and at a truce with herself, she ran upstairs to fetch her cloak, and soon they set out together, first to fetch Honor and Banny Lodder, then to drive on to the Tempests' house in Eton Square.

It seemed such ages to Christyn since she had seen Banny; she had almost forgotten what he was like. Yet only a fortnight had passed.

Well, there he sat opposite her, now, in the car, and it refreshed her to see the gleam of his even teeth, and to imagine the merriment of his eyes. One of earth's own creatures was Banny; like a tree, a patch of grass, with the personality of a jolly dog. Beside him Solterre was smoothing his hair with a silk handkerchief that smelt strongly of eau-de-Cologne. Like a well-groomed horse was Solterre, with something of a charming cat. Christyn reflected that he was one of those people whose eyes were made for the purpose of seeing and not as ornaments to his face, to be looked at.

Honor was fearsomely gay this evening. Her high spirits were inclined to dampen Christyn's, who withdrew into herself, feeling pathetically young. Honor was rather brilliantly discussing "Epicoene" with Solterre, laughing about it, quoting from it. Solterre, who had given her a fine old edition of Ben Jonson's plays the week before, laughed with her. Christyn had never read it. The lovely thing about Banny was

that he hadn't either and didn't care a damn. Banny was like that; his own lack of erudition never disturbed him or made him feel uncomfortable. Everybody couldn't be expected to be interested in that sort of stuff. Not that he despised people who were, but it took all kinds to make a world, and he was one of the other kind. He could appreciate Sol's first editions as well as anyone, enjoy good poetry and love music, stare at the pictures in the National Gallery and at the Elgin marbles with genuine pleasure. He knew his Shakespeare thoroughly; knew the names of all the French and German classics, and the names of the best modern Continental authors. What bored him, he didn't read, and what he didn't understand he didn't pretend to.

Christyn, on the other hand, could not bear to be out of it. Solterre gave her a great deal to read, yet her taste lagged behind all the time. She was essentially romantic and, for the moment, romanticism was taboo. Honor sighed tolerantly when Chopin and Schumann were mentioned, and Christyn tried to develop a passion for Mozart.

While the subject of "Epicoene" continued, the car swept on. Solterre, also, had grown eloquent.

"Oh, shurrup, you two!" Banny laughed wearily at last.

"All right, children," Honor replied sedately, "but all the same, you are monstrous rude, Sir Alban."

"Sorry, old thing."

The car swung into Eton Square. Banny lurched forward, steadied himself by thrusting out a hand that fell on Christyn's knee, and apologized. This induced mirth.

They arrived. As they went up the steps Solterre

stumbled. More laughter. As the door opened Honor said :

" If I had the power, I would never allow guests of mine to arrive in a party. They invariably behave badly, sit and laugh together and don't mix with the rabble as they ought."

" On the other hand they always enjoy themselves," Solterre whispered, for a domestic was gaping at them reproachfully. These young people were altogether too unrestrained in their merriment; quite obviously enjoying themselves, as a matter of fact, which was not very " nice."

Honor giggled; Banny snorted at some alabaster busts in the hall, whereat Solterre prodded him.

" Children, behave yourselves!" Honor commanded.

Solterre pulled a face. " I feel like being kissed," he stated with childish petulance. " Won't someone kiss me? "

" Consider yourself kissed," answered Honor archly, and followed Christyn upstairs to Mrs. Tempest's bedroom, where they took off their cloaks. A maid fussed around them both for a little, then left the room.

" You seem depressed, child," said Honor to Christyn's reflection in the dressing-table looking-glass, painting her mouth carefully.

" Oh, but I'm not!" Christyn smiled as brightly as she could. A little powder on her nose, thought Christyn, and applied it. She did not like the shade of Honor's lip-rouge or the shape of Honor's lips or the colour of Honor's teeth. She watched her for a little, then could not resist saying: " Oh, Honor, must you? "

" What? "

"That lip-stick of yours—the colour."

"Oh, my sweet child! It's simply adorable! What's the object of a lip-stick you can't see? I'll really have to take you in hand. Impressionism, don't you know, not imitativeness!"

"Very brilliant, Honor dear, but surely the end justifies the means," Christyn argued wearily. "It's a matter of beauty."

Honor was amused, affectionately amused. Still rather prim, this babe. "Oh, come, don't be sentimental!"

"No, only I should love to be myself; to rebel against rebellion."

"If you are in love with him to that extent," said Honor coolly, still to the reflection in the glass, "why don't you let yourself go?" She patted her curls. After all, this was evidently the root of Christyn's gloom.

"What do you mean?" cried Christyn. "Why do you suddenly bring this up . . . whom are you talking about?"

"About *him*—it doesn't matter whom, does it? I can only guess."

"Honor," Christyn begged, "be a friend of mine. What shall I do? Don't laugh at me. It's not funny. Marriage is impossible and he is so unhappy too, I am sure."

"Laugh at you?" Honor turned suddenly, her eyes very grave. "God forbid, my dear! I'm fighting for reality. Reality is my religion and the only ideal. If you love him, don't let the petty shams of conventionality get in your way. It'll make you morbid. Just go for Life. If you love him, it isn't fair to let him go through hell."

"Oh, but I don't want to get married now. It

would mean such sordidness, such misery!" Christyn was pleading more with herself than with Honor.

Honor raised her head. She hesitated. Then she almost whispered: "I don't mean marriage."

There was an eloquent silence; then as the full significance of Honor's advice dawned on her, Christyn grew a little angry.

"That's such marvellous advice to give anyone—but oneself!"

"I know what I'm saying!"—defiantly from Honor.

Christyn stared. Honor did not drop her eyes.

"You yourself . . . ?" Christyn grew pale.

"Must you ask me?" This time Honor tossed her head, her nostrils dilated.

"Honor, Honor!" Christyn seized both her hands, her heart beating wildly. "You have had the courage. . . ?"

Oh, lovely Honor, how Christyn loves you now. You have shown such bravery, and have done for love what Christyn knows she could never do. You have the courage of your convictions; you are no weakling. A great wave of emotion surged over Christyn. And yet the sudden thought that those hands, that mouth, that body. . . . She raised her hand to her forehead quickly as if to sweep the beastliness of the thought from her. Shame on you, Christyn. Oh, my God, only a fortnight ago, a fortnight ago her innocence had been so absolute, so inviolate! And now, instead of being overcome with horror, she was filled with admiration for this girl who had the courage to preach free love.

"Freedom!" said Honor with a mocking gesture that betrayed self-consciousness.

"Oh, Honor, dear Honor! How wonderful of you!"

"Tush, tush, I shall be had up for demoralizing a sweet child like you. . . ."

The maid returned with a message that the two gentlemen had been waiting some time and were getting impatient.

"Come along," said Honor, and took Christyn by the hand as if she were a frightened child.

CHAPTER XVI

PAGES FROM CHRISTYN'S DIARY

At two-thirty a.m. Christyn wrote in a diary which she occasionally kept :

" June 29th.

" This evening overwhelmed me. What Honor told me has haunted me and made me think. The awful thing is that for me it is a way out. But I mustn't think of it, because I can't do it, I can't. Later during the evening she explained lots of things to me. She says she cannot think why women must be innocent and not men; but that the late tendency for men to be equally virginal was worse than ever. She is so fearfully matter-of-fact about all these things, and makes me face facts with rather sound brutality. What a goose I have been! If only mother had been a little more systematic in her upbringing of me—poor mother! But she told me nothing, and let me go about and find out the wrong things, and now there is no one to tell me anything.

" Honor is deeply unhappy about her own affairs. Having had the courage to be true to herself, she realizes that she is a martyr to her cause.

" Within the last fortnight my entire life seems to have changed. I have fallen in love, I have discarded several of my illusions, I have made a friend—and to-night I lost a lover. Alban Lodder fell visibly in

love with Vivyan Tempest, Sol's old 'flame,' to-night. How odd it is to watch that kind of thing. He seemed so shy of me, as if I would mind, and of course I am only glad. Oh, but am I? I must be honest with myself. I felt alone, rather deserted, because Sol is so aloof, Honor so superbly wrapped in her new beliefs, Neilson so far away. And now Banny is in love with Vivyan Tempest. It startled me because she is so very sweet and yet nothing at all. I can now see what he loved in me—my fair hair and my childish mouth, in fact what Honor would define in me as 'Goo-goo,' and it makes me thank God that I never gave way to my infatuation and that we never became lovers. Dear me! What an escape! To have found in me only that which others possess in such a greater degree, and not to have even sought the real values of my character. Vivyan has a fair skin and pretty fair hair and big brown eyes. It is enough to wound one's vanity! 'So that was all!' one says to oneself."

In the morning she wrote :

"I do not want to join the vast army of 'artistic' females who waste their time and other people's, pen, ink, canvas, etc., and yet, for the first time I see why the said females do it. I tried to practise the piano this morning, and all the time I could do nothing but ferret my own worries. Neilson. I write the name as a kind of relief. Honor says that I am a hundred per cent Woman, and I think she is right, because I am not creative and am unable to divide my life from my love. Men can do that, and that is why they are still the great creative geniuses. Neilson goes on writing in spite of me, while I moon about, as Honor says contemptuously, 'in a state of coma.'

"Men resent women who work, because then life does not centre around love, but around work and love, like work and recreation which has always been Men's attitude anyhow. They want love to mean life to women. When it doesn't, they call them hard and unsexed. Honor is the hard and unsexed kind of woman.

"(All this is Honor's teaching. Like an obedient dog I duly lap it up.)

"I think I shall go about labelled 'I am the last of the Real Women, soft and' . . . no, 'sexed' sounds so indecent and dreadful, and not a bit what I mean.

"I have to get ready to go to a lesson in St. John's Wood. John Parnell awaits me. Perhaps I shall see Neilson. Then I am going shopping. And I shall insist on going by myself. I am becoming so go-ahead. To-day Sol is buying tickets for the Pink Cross Ball at the Hyde Park Hotel. That will be my first subscription dance, unchaperoned!

"I am so glad I told Honor about Neilson last night. I have told her about everything in my life now. Real confidence means one confessor only. To spread confidences and confessions among several friends is as inefficacious as to keep them to oneself. One can have only one friend and feel no loneliness. But, I find to have three jolly companions makes for the most ghastly loneliness."

After luncheon Christyn wrote again :

"This writing is a relief to me. One's diary doesn't answer back or argue. And it clears one's head and makes one's thoughts coherent.

"I went to the studio this morning and everything was so odd! Terry was quite subdued, and the house

was hushed as if someone had died. Gaby is having a first night to-night, and was in a state of nervous tension. I mustn't forget to send him a telegram. Neilson looked haggard and very white, and I have never seen a face suddenly light up as his did when he saw that I smiled at him. Did he expect me to sulk? I know I lost my temper the last time we met, and we parted in anger, but I just can't sulk, and I felt so sorry for him. He seemed quite bowed.

" . . . Suddenly, without reason or rhyme, I am crying. It is the pity of things that makes me cry. The pity for beauty that is never allowed to be whole. The sadness of truth as compared to the joy of illusion that is romance. The cruelties of the 'ologies' that tear and tear and make us so horribly wiser. Oh, God, I can't bear it! Life is terrifying me, and I am only on the brink of it! And oh, why Neilson of all men? And it is sincere, this love of mine for him, and I wanted to take his head on my breast this morning, and comfort him, but I could not. And I know that he loves me as he never loved anyone before, I know it. When one knows things right to the core of one's heart as I know this, one isn't wrong. He isn't wicked when he flirts with Phillipa, only he obeys an irresistible impulse to make himself loved. He can't bear not to be loved. I understand that. But no one else understands.

" In very truth the sign of the Cross and the story of the Crucifixion of Christ is the crucifixion of the Ideal. The Ideal gets crucified every time. Neilson wrote that a long time ago, and I read it and didn't understand. But when one goes through a crisis, all at once every line of poetry one reads, every word one hears, becomes fraught with depth.

" Something so strange happened at the studio.

Parnell has always called me 'Christina,' and I know he once loved an Italian girl called Christina. Sol told me all about it. I know Parnell is very fond of me—it's obvious—and I never troubled about it. This morning, just as Neilson came into the room, Parnell again addressed me as Christina, and I saw Neilson looking daggers at him. It occurred to me that the original Christina, whose namesake I am, was Parnell's mistress, and that Neilson considered his using the same name for me as an insult. So I explained to Neilson on the spot, as quietly as I could, that I felt it a great honour to have such a sacred name conferred upon me, and that surely Parnell must be very fond of me to have done it. I don't care who or what the original Christina was; the fact of his having loved her was enough. Neilson was astonished, and Parnell could only kiss my hand and murmur: 'Oh, you are good, you are good!' But I don't see that I am good at all, only somewhat vain and inclined to think people want to be flattering rather than offensive to me. Unfortunately Pender was in the room, so I had to speak in a very low voice. I told Neilson that I was going out this afternoon, and that probably I should indulge in the toy-shop habit at about half-past four. Pender didn't understand that, but I think Neilson did.

"Why, oh why are they all so depressed at the studio? I felt so miserable when I left, for I have never known them anything but quite noisily happy. Is it the hot weather? It certainly is hot to-day. And Neilson was totally unlike himself. To think that only the day before yesterday I was so furious with him! I wonder whether he is so low-spirited because he thinks I quarrelled with him for good the other day!

" Oh, I really need not be so wretched. Neilson is very young, and his whole life is before him. He can wipe out all his past sins if he really sets about it—only it was so unnecessary to flirt with Phillipa. Phillipa! Now I am tingling all over again, with shame and wounded vanity. I somehow forgot why I was angry with him, I only knew vaguely that something had upset me. It is strange how resentful I am. Most people say ' I forgive but I don't forget,' but that seems nonsense. I *do* forget, luckily, and in that oblivion my anger is drowned, but when something wakes up the memory, then all my resentment wakes with it, and that means I don't forgive. The vision of Neilson smiling his side-smile into Phillipa's face fills me with painful contempt—and contempt of myself, too. That I should stoop to take any interest, *to be in love with*, such a cad, fills me with shame. And it enrages me all the more that he knows it. I feel about it as I did that day at Honor's house-party, the afternoon before her dance. I do him too great an honour. He is disgracefully pleased with his easy conquest of me. *It was easy*. I told him it would be at the time.

" Oh, why do I torture myself by writing all these things! I love him, and if I write any more now, I shall miss him at half-past four in front of the toy-shop in the Brompton Road."

Before going to bed, she wrote :

" When I got to the toy-shop, he was waiting there for me. We barely spoke to each other until we had crossed the road and were going into the Park. . . .

" I am tired. Too tired really to write everything down. We talked a lot, and, now that it is over,

I know we said nothing. And I am sorry it is over, and curse myself for not making the best of time.

"He seemed on the point of telling me something and then refraining, and like a fool, I was too proud to insist on knowing what it was. All I know is that he has changed so terribly since I last saw him that it is hard to believe that it was Neilson himself. Of course he still says a lot of preposterous things, and still has the same gallant manner, the same romantic attitude, but he behaved all the time as if he ought not to be there, and consequently there was a strange look of determination on his face as if he had come on purpose to disobey himself. All this sounds unintelligible, now I read it over, but I know what I mean. He said something I did not quite grasp, about my having saved him from being sucked under in the mud of his present surroundings, and saved his respect for womanhood. He said that he himself was a fool not to have kept his eye on the saner side of things, but that now he intended to break away, even at the expense of never seeing Gaby or Parnell again. He called himself names, 'weakling,' and 'cad,' and begged my forgiveness. Yet, never once did he become melodramatic. Only rather weary and languid, with the side-smile on his face the whole time. He seemed as surprised at himself as I was.

"Oh, I am so tired, but I am glad to have written this. A diary is an odd thing. One writes it for oneself, and yet in one's heart of hearts one always expects it to be read. Some day perhaps Neilson will read it, and then we shall laugh about it together.

"Aunt Amelia seems to be becoming reasonable. I told her I went shopping, and showed her a pair of

stockings I had bought, and she wasn't nearly as scandalized over the fact that I went alone, as I thought she would be.

"I am going to bed."

This is a day in the life of Christyn de Solterre.

CHAPTER XVII

STUDIO BREAKFAST

SUNDAY morning at eleven o'clock.

Neilson is depressed. Perhaps the month of May in St. John's Wood can be glorious, but the month of June anywhere in London is invariably ghastly. To-day is stifling, and it is quite probably going to rain. It's all wrong. The studio is a dirty place; Terry, damn and blast him, belongs to a music-hall. No one but the artists would put up with him for five minutes. Parnell in his pyjamas at the piano. Languid Gaby with his theatre-talk, whose sense of balance has completely capsized. In the night Neilson lies awake with rage, and says aloud to an imaginary Parnell: "Why the hell don't you wear pyjamas all day? Why do you ever dress at all?" And angrily turns on his other side, trying to go to sleep. It is remarkable how rage can keep one awake.

Oh, God! The mess he is in! All his own fault, too, which only makes it worse. Phillipa, the devil take her. That, however, is remediable. And now, curse it, that Sparrow and her bottle of shoe-cleaner. With his elbows on the desk, chin in hands, Neilson stares in front of him at the dirty window and visualizes the disgusting scene that took place the morning after the studio supper. The Sparrow's untidy bedroom, the Sparrow herself lying on the bed fully dressed, weeping hysterically between fits of

vomiting, calling out Neilson's name. Drayton sitting on a chair by the bed, his fingers in his lank, fair hair, quietly crying like a child that has been very deeply hurt. The most revolting affair Neilson had ever witnessed; and its greatest tragedy was its absurdity, its scope for ridicule. Ridicule for the Sparrow, merciless, biting, a mortal wound. Ridicule for that cuckold Drayton, and for Neilson an instance of the irony of Fate. Of course this must happen just now, adding insult to injury. Now, *now* that he loves at last, now that he has found what he did not even dare to seek, must all the filth of his past rise to the top, so that Christyn should not only see, but understand too perfectly—much more perfectly than he would ever have tried to make her understand—what he really is, how muddy and besmirched is the swine he had described to her that night at Honor's dance.

Christyn, whom he met secretly three days ago, ought not to inhabit his brain at the same time as this dirt. She belongs to another world, another life altogether. She has nothing to do with Neilson, poet and philanderer. She has barely met him, that foul, unlovely young rip with his menagerie, but she is so white that she believes she knows the worst of him; she is unable to conceive anything darker than grey. He has not the courage to teach her the meaning of black. She has only met George Neilson, Solterre's school-friend, Alban Lodder's cousin, Honor Pembroke's chum, Phillipa Martinez's "flirtation," and the creature who loves her so profoundly. Yes, he loves her more than passionately, and without the blindness of passion. He loves her with appreciation, and knows that there will never be anyone who will appreciate again as he does her purity and intelligence, her inexperience and passion, her originality and

sense of formality, her untaught voluptuousness, her breeding. He knows why he loves her, and aches with sadness because he is just who he is, and yet a connoisseur. He has imaginary conversations with her, and in one of them she asks whether she is his first love, and he replies: "Beloved, I would not offend you by saying I love you best, and yet that you are my first love. What standard could I have if that were so? No, you are my great love, my climax, my masterpiece, my love of loves. I am like a traveller who has travelled in many cities and has at last found the City Beautiful."

Indeed his had been a pilgrimage as Banny's had not been, and yet Banny was a model young man. Only Sol understood. But Sol had strength, such as Neilson had not taken the trouble to have. Sol was of the pilgrims to the shrine of love with eyes fixed on the one red rose, severely culling no pretty flowers by the wayside. Another time Neilson said to his phantom of Christyn: "I have tasted until I know how to bake this cake. I have broken hearts open until I know the look of the inside of a heart: just where a touch would wound, a word would heal. Until now I have tossed life about as if it had been a ball, knowing it to be a crystal ball, enjoying the risk, the excitement of the possibility of smashing it. Now I will treat it carefully. You think I cannot help myself in my weaknesses; even flirting with Phillipa was deliberate. 'One more toss into the air,' I said. Alas, why did I do it? But those days are over. I promise, I swear, I *know* they are over."

And they would be over, except for the irony of Fate. Now, at last, Neilson would be careful of life and life's happiness. He has learnt how to handle Love's jewellery, he understands the importance of a

caress, he has all the technique of delight and could make Christyn so happy. What nonsense to expect love to be strong enough to stand all tests. Love's beauty is its frailty, its delicacy; it is as if one considered a wonderful piece of lace valueless because of its delicacy. And yet, for all this philosophizing, Christyn is not for him because he is soiled. The bitterness, the inevitability of it! He, the one person who, just because of that soiling could, by appreciating her, make her happiest. "Oh, God! Just one more chance! I will never fail to respect life again. Let me begin again."

Sitting there, in front of his desk before breakfast, Neilson realized with sudden horror that he could not write, that in any case writing such as he did was not a profession, not a livelihood, that on the whole the only people who could justly regard it as a profession were novelists. He, Neilson, was primarily a poet, and only incidentally a novelist. He worked on impulse. There, before him, lay a novel which he had begun to write a month ago. He could go no further; his writings were a series of artistic accidents. Oh, what a fine fellow he was to be sure! Bitterly he found that there was yet another point to add to his glorification: he had never worked solidly, reasonably for any lengthy period in his life.

He leapt up, threw down his pen with a gasp of misery, and shuffled into the studio where some tea and toast awaited him. There sat Parnell, having finished eating, of course in his pyjamas. Gaby, in the greater decency of a dressing-gown, lay on the divan reading his own Press notices in the Sunday papers. The critics to-day were as kind as the weekly ones had been, for Gaby had an undeniably

good technique and was a favourite. A cigarette hung from his lips. "Gosh!" he exclaimed with satisfaction.

"Gaby using slang!" observed Parnell. "Decent notices?"

"Hm-hm," Gaby nodded.

"Misplaced," grumbled Parnell quietly, staring at a page of music in front of him.

"What?" asked Gaby, leaping up.

"You know as well as I do that you weren't really playing the lead on Friday night," Parnell continued unruffled. "The lead was taken by a boy who wasn't even billed. You were starred and had a wonderful part—but it wasn't the lead, I maintain it wasn't."

Perhaps it wasn't, reflected Gaby, as the sun of his complacency suddenly went under. The drama centred around a youth and his beloved, whose joy was marred through two acts and a half by a former lover of hers—played by Gabriel Herbert. Gaby's part had been added to and pushed into the foreground on purpose to justify the fact of his having been cast for it (not to mention the salary he was receiving), and the youth's speeches, which could not be cut for fear of unbalancing the plot, were all spoken either facing the back-cloth, or from the corners of the stage. But, after all, it was not Gaby's fault; he had not suggested any of these conditions. It was the management who had taken for granted that Gaby must be given prominence.

"Damn it all," he complained, "I don't know what you're driving at."

"The fact is that the day of the infant is at hand—in every branch and walk of life. We have infants in music, in painting, in business—especially in politics and in literature—and they are cropping up

more quickly on the stage now than ever before." Parnell took a cigarette. "I'm thinking they are only cleverer nowadays than they were twenty years ago, those great actors and managers, not any nobler. In the old days we never heard the end of it because women of forty played Juliet, and we had *ingénues* hopping about, aged half a century. Your young lover had to wear a wig to cover his baldness, and your ancient fathers and mothers had to draw tram-lines on their faces, and powder their lips and eyes in an attempt to drown their youthfulness and joy of life in a box of make-up. The newspapers gave 'em hell over it, and they've taken the hint. So now they're wiser. Juliet, sure enough, gets played by a young girl, but is she starred as the lead? Not she! The Nurse gets the booming because she's got the name, and poor little Juliet gets pushed into the background. And still those blamed fools of playwrights go on writing plays in which the principal parts are for infants. When you first went on the stage you played a number of parts that you were too young for; then you made a hit in a young man's part. That was the greatest piece of luck I ever heard of. Now, at the age of thirty-five, someone offers you a play in which the hero is a boy of nineteen. Twenty, even ten years ago, you would cheerfully have accepted the part of the boy; nowadays you are afraid of ridicule. But do you sacrifice yourself entirely? Not quite. You quietly take the second part, fatten it up, and push the legitimate lead into the background. I suppose it can't be helped."

Gaby could only gasp. This was the coolest home-truth he had ever heard or had to put up with.

"Well," Parnell went on, "I'm not blaming you. There's only one way of getting out of it, and that is

to get put into the right plays. It's got nothing to do with you, after all, so long as you get your salary. Parts are judged always by salaries. It's the fault of the playwrights. For them, apparently, interest in life seems to cease for anyone over forty. I admit that yours is an exceptional case in this play; forty is, normally, the ideal age. You've started the second-part-star business too early, my lad, and could still be playing *bona fide* leads. But in five years' time, unless they've found a new way of dealing with the problem of casting leading actors and actresses of a certain age, you'll be doing fattened secondary parts all the time."

"But why the deuce should the beginners get all the cream for nothing?" exploded Gaby, goaded now beyond endurance.

"I quite agree; why indeed? It's quite fair that you should get the kudos when you've worked all your life. Only it seems odd that they aren't more open and honest about such a fair transaction."

Parnell's irony seemed to mollify Gaby a little. He grunted. Neilson smiled and said:

"What is he to do after all? He can't very well go to the management and say grandly: 'I refuse to be starred because I am playing a secondary part.' They must get someone who will help to fill their houses. In fact, I should think the system gives quite a fair chance to the very young actor who hasn't played big parts before. He gets the opportunity of being seen by numbers of people originally attracted by the other 'star.' Even if the part is cooked and squashed it is better than a really small one."

"Yes," agreed Parnell, "that would work out perfectly if it weren't for the critics. They're nearly

always personal, and almost invariably criticize an actor according to his prestige and not his part. If you, Gaby, played the part of an unimportant butler to-morrow, any of those critics whose pet you are, would mention you first in his criticisms and give you quite a lot of importance. The poor mutt who takes the lead would get the same consideration, exactly, as he is getting from his management."

"Now, don't go for the critics!" Neilson laughed. "I've been one myself once or twice. It's too damn difficult. If one tries to be impersonal and doesn't take one's very own taste into account, one has to do away with instinct, and then where is one? On the other hand, only taking one's personal taste as a criterion is fatal. One ought to be wholly eclectic, to like everything that is good of its own type. Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw and Shakespeare and Pinero and God knows what. Wilde wrote one play just like a Paris dressmaking firm creates one model and then goes on using the same plan. He wrote the same story, differently trimmed each time. Mr. Shakespeare, treating him from a purely modern point of view—as if he were, well, Mr. C. K. Munro, for instance—would be stoned. He isn't stoned because, for once, the critic criticizes from the right point of view. The other is like saying that Japanese masks or bull-dogs or butterflies are not beautiful because they are grotesque or pretty. It's a sad thing, but the ideal critic ought to have no tendencies. By that I mean he ought neither to feel with the modern and *macabre*, or romantic and sentimental, nor yet intellectual and classical. He ought always to be able to realize their individual qualities. In that case, of course, he would not be able to allow himself the pleasure of being influenced by the person-

ality of the actor or actress. This marvellous automaton would have no favourites. No actor would ever have a fixed or secure reputation on the stage because he would have to make a new one for himself with every new part he undertakes. There would, consequently, be no 'stars.' " Neilson paused, then added: "Wouldn't it be deadly? What d'you say to that, Gaby?"

Gaby, who had resumed his perusal of the most laudatory of all his notices, looked up and said: "What did you say?"

"Oh, God!" Neilson groaned. "I've gone and wasted all my brilliance. That's finished the subject for me, for ever and aye. Once one has discussed something, it is impossible to write about it. The only incitement to writing about anything is self-expression. If one wastes this incitement in the vaporous medium of mere speech, so much the worse. And as all our conversation was chiefly for the edification of Gaby, and he has missed it, let us retire as gracefully as possible, our subject-matter and our energy completely squandered."

"Thank you kindly," Parnell nodded. "I've been listening with interest all the time. Sure, your brains have been completely squandered."

Neilson shrugged his shoulders and buttered a piece of soggy toast. He addressed Gaby again. "Wake up and tell us whether you would like to be freshly judged as an artist with every new part you play."

"What?"

"I have been dissertating learnedly on the Perfect Critic. If he existed you would be to-day just where you were before you made your first success; Parnell would be judged as a teacher only by every new

successful pupil; and I would have to work up or down to the critic's standard with every new volume I produce."

"We'd be having only Art, and no artists," Parnell rejoined, "for, under the circumstances, artists would be as good as anonymous. One could begin by having no names on theatre programmes: your verse, Neilson, would be anonymous, and I would have to wear a mask."

"What a ghastly state!" exclaimed Gaby, waving his hands in horror.

"Too platonic, I admit. If Honor were logical she would agree to it all," Neilson went on, "but as no one is logical, she can hardly be expected to be. Of course it's a ghastly state. Parnell and I and especially you are built up by the Imperfect Critic. You, by the way, were greatly helped by the Critics Who Don't Count, whom we haven't taken the pains to discuss—by the different lady critics and biassed old men, who have obtained sinecures on the less serious daily papers. Parnell's fame is only a little more lawful. I, personally, owe nearly all my success with the publishers—because my work sells unusually well for verse—I owe nearly all my success to creatures like Phillipa and Honor. There you are—personality again!"

"Vanity, vanity!" quoted Parnell, "and yet where would we all be without it?"

"Nowhere," replied Neilson laconically, having swallowed a mouthful of tepid coffee. "It's the greatest, the most utilized spur of all. It's the ladder to heaven."

"Heaven by the back-door," argued Parnell, "although I admit that in your ideal and platonic state, Art would very soon cease altogether. But that

only shows up human nature in a very unfortunate light; it doesn't alter the Ideal."

"Ideal!" Neilson laughed. "Each man his own God, surely! There is nothing so cruel as perfect purity. Strip every sphere of its human quality, and you arrive at the most iron austerity. The Nirvanah; but then, who desires the Nirvanah?"

"What?" asked Gaby, smothering a yawn and stretching himself. He rose from the divan and started collecting his newspapers.

Neilson wondered at him. This was his brother, flesh of his flesh, and they had similarly shaped heads. That for heredity, that for environment. Neilson metaphorically snapped his fingers. As a small boy, Neilson once asked Gaby whether he ever dreamt dreams. "No, but I sometimes have the most awful nightmares if I eat anything that disagrees with me," Gaby had confided with all earnestness. That was Gaby. They did not speak the same language, he and Neilson. Parnell liked him, Neilson was amused by him. This man was actually a fine actor. The fact astounded Neilson. He went on talking:

"Gaby should be the most popular conversationalist in London. He never talks himself. Most people adore that. You ask a person who has spent an afternoon talking uninterruptedly whether he enjoyed himself and what sort of a man his companion was, and he'll tell you he adored it, and the fellow was most interesting."

Gaby yawned again and made for the door. "Neilson," he said lazily, "you are a great man. I'm not so utterly stupid as you think, although I haven't been listening very intently all the time to the marvellous things you've been saying, and have forgotten what the Nirvanah is. They just bore me—

your mental gymnastics, as you call them—and they don't seem to lead you anywhere. Life's too short. I'm going to get dressed."

Yes, that was his brother all right, that utter stranger.

"What were we talking about?" asked Parnell, when he had gone.

"The Ideal State," Neilson answered absently. "By a process of elimination only does one achieve it. D'you want it?"

"Not I!"

"Nor I. Only Honor seems to want to try it."

Parnell raised his eyebrows doubtfully. "Honor?"

"So she seems to suggest," Neilson said a little wearily. "Apparently one begins with stoicism and with pure selflessness. One gives up, one tries to do away with possessiveness, with ownership, and so forth." He looked up at Parnell. "That's splendid for a time, when one is feeling independent. But, here on earth, do as the mortals do."

"One pays for that lack of possessiveness, too," Parnell mused. "That was at the bottom of the tragedy of Christina."

"Christina?"

"My Christina. A thousand years ago." There was a long pause. "Better be getting some clothes on," he sighed.

Yes, better, thought Neilson. Possessiveness, selflessness. He followed Parnell to the door and leant against the door-post thoughtfully.

There was nothing in all this talk, talk, talk. There was only his thirst for Christyn, his longing for temporary human happiness—with Christyn. Heartache swallowed by toothache; spirituality and ideal swallowed up by flesh and human desires.

Neilson left the studio. Terry began to clear away the remains of breakfast.

Neilson's thoughts went back to Christyn.

Christyn and he had been too restless the last time they met. They had met, not as old friends but as strangers on an adventure; she had appeared nervous, self-prejudiced, sometimes against, sometimes in favour of him. Over an hour in Hyde Park alone with Christyn, and nothing said, not a thing worth saying. Oh, for another hour like that with Christyn!

He must go back to his little front room, stare at the faded hawthorn in the square plot before his window, and try to write. But he knew he could not write. Only perform those mental gymnastics that Gaby so despised. Oh, well, here's for the mental gymnastics then.

He sat down at his desk again and picked up his pen. Nothing. He stared vacantly at the hawthorn and thought nothing. There was nothing to think. Nobody knew anything or anybody and nobody cared to know. All the millions of people who rushed blindly on, passing time without pausing to breathe. Lo! Now I am suddenly old, and it's all over. The first meeting with Christyn: "Yes, for nearly three years one says to oneself, 'I am nearly grown-up,' and one morning one wakes up and says, 'I am grown-up, and nothing will ever make me a child again'"—or words to that effect. One passes toy-shops and stops before them, perhaps every day; one wishes one had that lovely steam-engine, but one doesn't take the trouble to long for it. Then, one day, one passes the toy-shop again, and one realizes that one wouldn't really know what to do with the steam-engine if one had it. Eleanor Barthone matters. One has forgotten how to play whole-heartedly with

toys. Ten years later, by the most amazing coincidence, one watches Eleanor's child going through the same thing. This time the maturing process has been done by death, not love. Eleanor is no more. Eleanor, his adored one, is nothing. His first love. Now it is Christyn, Eleanor's own daughter, physically so like Eleanor, but for all that, no more similar to her in temperament than he is to Gaby. His great love. The other day, when he met Christyn again in front of the toy-shop, he did not even look in the window, he only thought of Christyn.

Neilson opened a drawer, took out a pack of cards, shuffled them, and began to lay a patience. An ace up. Good. Black seven on red eight. Now there is a space for a king, but no king turns up. . . .

He knows he ought to take a walk : Regent's Park, or Primrose Hill. It would do him good. But who cares? Too lazy to move. And if he were robustly full of energy, what then? The world would go round just the same; millions of people taking a long time to die, telling themselves they are living; suffering, vegetating until the end, their consolation being that they shall sing-a-ling-a-ling in heaven. Souls look like white steam from a boiling tea-kettle. That for the old-fashioned kind. The newer conception did away with the pastel-shaded heaven, but the fundamentals were the same. Always one's individuality survived. It was delightfully simple and it made them happy! A good thing that not everyone is filled with Neilson's sense of futility.

Turn up three cards at a time; begin over and over again until the patience comes out. He is going to do one for luck. He wishes a wish. If the patience comes out, his wish will come out too.

It would be so much decenter to take a walk. This

is the sheerest waste of valuable time. No, no, suffering does not improve beautiful natures, lovely, soft, gentle natures. If you knock gold about, it alters its shape, that is all. It turns the sweet to bitterness and disillusion the peacefully happy. Only hard natures, those that were not really beautiful to begin with, finally learnt by suffering. Honor, intelligent and hard, will learn by suffering, will soften, be mellowed, become more sympathizing by it. But Christyn will harden, become cleverer, perhaps use her head to understand with instead of her intuition, but she will not become lovelier. And to what end? Why learn all these lessons? One cannot even pass them on. Surely then, there must be immortality of something. Nothing is ever wasted in nature; it is illogical that life, experience, should count for nothing. That is Neilson's hope.

That blasted patience refuses to come out. This is most depressing; it means his wish won't either. Damn. Try another.

Yes, suddenly time has fled, and he is frightened; terrified of making a mess, of fizzling out. So far, marvellous. Only twenty-eight, and nearly everyone knows that there is a young poet living called Neilson. It is very likely that they will not forget him when he is dead. But perhaps he is going to be asked to pay heavily for his glory with his happiness? He has been striding on, not caring because nothing leads anywhere anyhow. Now, how far has he travelled? He pauses to take a breath, and sees that he has been walking in mud. No, this will never do. What a pity one cannot be everything! Delicious to be able to eat one's cake and have it too. To possess both experience and simplicity.

King up. Ace up. We're coming along. Turn

over that card; five of spades, which can go on that six of diamonds. Three cards again. Four of clubs. Splendid! That can go on the . . . no, what a pity, it can't. That's a five of spades—black. . . .

There is only one doctrine, and that is the doctrine of kindness and understanding. One can never go far wrong if one makes up one's mind never to hurt anyone willingly. Phillipa. How unnecessary that was—to have hurt Phillipa. He wished he hadn't. That for the impulses he had purposely indulged. "I know what I'm doing." But had he known? Now he made up his mind to have a principle in life. Odd, wasn't it, that he, Neilson, the scallywag, should think about principles. Right and wrong next, proper and improper, moral and immoral, nice and nasty. How pretty! Won't the dear old ladies love him? In spite of being afraid of the Other Fellow laughing at him, he insists on being severe with himself. Yes, he tells himself brutally, he wants to be good. Let them laugh, let them call him sentimental. Purity, crystalline purity. To be kind, not to hurt, to love the sun and the pink hawthorn and the comic faces of small children; to be grateful to the billions of sufferers who do not complain, to realize their patience and bravery. God in man. He is humble. Above all, not to hurt, to be kind. That is to be his principle. It is the safest of all, it can never, never be wrong. And it will make him happy.

Bejabers! This game looks as if it were coming out! Two of clubs on the ace there, and nine of diamonds up on that ten of spades!

He is suddenly more at peace with himself. Not religious, but just happier. Ha-ha, this patience is coming out! Two on the three and . . .

The telephone. He runs to answer it.

"Hullo? Who? Yes, it's Neilson. Sol? All right, come along. Drive out with you to Windsor, to Honor's? Splendid. I should love it. Did you say Christyn's going too? Oh, God bless you, m'lord! Rather! I see, I see. . . ."

Mrs. Pembroke will be occupied with her Russian protégée, Princess Vladimir, who has come for the week-end, so they will be quite undisturbed; just Honor and Sol and Neilson; her own dear friends. Banny is having tea with his new Vivyan Tempest and won't come. Spend the night, Neilson, and drive down with Sol and Christyn. It is going to be perfectly lovely.

The sun will shine again, and if it rains, the rain will be cool. And oh, to be out of London to-day! Who cares about the futility of Life? Oh, Christyn, you are life and you are not futile. Neilson is whistling. Oh, Joy! Joy! Joy!

(Quick, before he goes, just that four up and that knave of spades. The patience has come out. Hooray!)

There is a purpose in life, surely, oh surely!

CHAPTER XVIII

THUNDER

At about a quarter to twelve Sol's motor-horn sounded outside Neilson's window. Again. Hoot-hoot. Hoot-hoot. Neilson, who had been waiting, seized his suitcase, called his adieux to Gaby, Parnell and Terry, and gratefully hastened out of the studio. What a wonderful day it was going to be in the country! The Pembrokes' house was not far from the river, and the sun would certainly be shining outside London.

Sol drove his forty horse-power four-seater almost noiselessly away from the door of No. 16. Not quite noiselessly, however, for it made a certain amount of sound; a rich crackling sound, fat and opulent. A lazy personality it had, this car, like a powerful, big blue insect.

Beside Sol sat delicious Christyn in a shantung-silk dust-coat, her head ensconced in a motoring-hat the shape of a poke-bonnet. The car purred comfortably down the Wellington Road at a rate of thirty miles per hour that felt like twenty. A hot wind fanned Neilson, who was sitting beside his suit-case at the back; the air was petrol-laden and heavy, the light so white and glaring that it hurt his eyes.

They neared Shepherd's Bush, where Neilson became more conscious than usual of the fact that England was an over-inhabited island. The very pavements seemed to be perspiring. There were multitudes of pasty-faced little girls with weather-bitten brittle hair, who wore too much underclothing

beneath their starched white cotton frocks; pale blue bows adorned their hair, black woollen stockings their feet. Millions of little girls holding the hands of smaller, even paler, brothers, who wore either blue serge caps or floppy straw sailor-hats. It was all so dreadfully white, so stifling. At Shepherd's Bush a policeman held up the traffic, and the three of them were in danger of suffocation from clouds of petrol fumes that were being sneezed out by a veteran limousine (1910 model) in front of them. A man standing on the pavement actually breathed alcohol into Neilson's face. The heat was merciless. Neilson felt inspired to compose a hymn to the Infernal Regions, beginning :

" This Odoriferous Cosmos
Reeks of haphazard intemperance. . . ."

It meant nothing, but it comforted him : " This odoriferous cosmos. . . ."

" Filthy stink ! " shouted Solterre.

The policeman lowered his hand, Solterre sighed with relief, and the car moved cautiously forward again.

" Oh, my God ! " Christyn exclaimed. " At last we can breathe ! "

Neilson leant back exhausted, and closed his eyes blissfully.

They sped on. Now came that delight to all motorists—the new Bath Road. Solterre eagerly accelerated with a whoop of delight, and they positively shot ahead. Christyn took off her poke-bonnet, let down her hair, and allowed it to fly like a banner in the wind. At last Neilson found it cool. London was behind them.

It seemed to Honor that in all her life no one had

ever disturbed her less than Princess Vladimir—that gallant Russian lady who kept a dress-shop in Grafton Street. The only thing that did, in fact, keep Honor in a state of apprehension was her own mother's gift for never saying or doing quite the wrong thing and yet invariably managing to convey that she was about to. Honor kept a list of the things that would have wounded the Princess had her mother really followed her line of action. As it was, Mrs. Pembroke usually swerved aside, and Honor breathed again, not, however, daring to meet the eye of her mother's guest. It was ghastly, in Honor's opinion, to be a Russian refugee and a lady, and to be the protégée of an American citizeness. Princess Vladimir's gentle dignity and patience made Honor squirm. It seemed all wrong that her mother should patronize this lady, this unsnobbish, courageous lady.

They sat at breakfast, Mrs. Pembroke, Princess Vladimir and Honor.

"Tell me, Honor," said the Princess, "what has happened to our friend Sergei, the sculptor, you know, whom I met after so many years at your house a few months ago?"

The Russian sculptor with the squashed nose. Our friend Sergei.

Honor, who had been carefully spreading a morsel of toast with marmalade, looked up. Her eyes were like brown velvet. "Gone to Paris," she informed them, and returned to the toast again.

"How d'you know?" asked her mother.

"Oh," Honor returned airily, "I went to his rooms, rummaged his drawers, and read all his letters, of course!"

"Honor, really!" whined Mrs. Pembroke, outraged.

"Well, mother, if you will ask questions of that sort, you can only expect absurd answers. How does one find out when people go away, and where they go? Neilson and Gaby told me, of course."

"Honor always makes such strange friends," complained Mrs. Pembroke. "I wish she wouldn't have so many quaint people around her!"

"A batch of my strange friends are coming down this morning to spend a day and a night," Honor addressed the Princess, "so you'll be able to judge for yourself."

"Oh, well, *those* friends are different," interposed Mrs. Pembroke.

"Why?" challenged Honor. "Sol perhaps, but Neilson is not at all 'normal,' as you'd put it. And though you wouldn't know it, the most unusual type of the lot is Christyn."

"She's a very nice, well-behaved little girl," defended Mrs. Pembroke.

"Exactly."

"Honor laughs at her because she isn't wild and sticks to the conventions. It's a pity there aren't more like her."

"I don't laugh at her; certainly she sticks to the conventions. I told you she was unusual. She's almost conventional, yes—nearly as original as that!"

"Honor, really!"

The Princess smiled. She enjoyed Honor's way of putting things.

"These are all friends of Sergei's?"

"They have all met him, yes."

"I thought you used to see quite a lot of him?"

"Yes, we used to," said Honor, very vaguely indeed.

The Princess made no further comment. Breakfast was over; they rose and went out into the garden. Mrs. Pembroke took a basket and scissors and went to cut flowers for the dinner-table. The sultry weather did not agree with her, but she was glad of it because she could eat less and it improved her figure. Honor took Princess Vladimir for a walk. They talked about Russia. The Princess did not mention Sergei again.

When Sol's car and its occupants appeared, Honor had just returned to the house with her charge, and Mrs. Pembroke, her arms full of sweet williams and roses, panted into sight from around the corner. Little beads of perspiration had gathered on her nose with the uniformity of decoration. Pastry, thought her daughter, as she watched her shake hands with Solterre, white powder and face-cream in little blotches like dough. Why must mother always make herself ridiculous?

They trooped in to luncheon. Honor was languid and exquisite with a suspicion of boredom. She longed to get mother out of the way; longed rather obviously, in Christyn's opinion. It gave Christyn a slight sense of discomfort on behalf of Mrs. Pembroke, and she would have liked Honor to be a little more hypocritical. Christyn, who had tidied her hair and replaced the poke-bonnet during the latter part of the drive, could not resist the temptation of parodying herself by being prim. Solterre was elegantly polite, displayed perfect manners, and constantly addressed his hostess. Neilson pretended, and succeeded, to look wholly at ease, and was engrossed with the Russian lady. Only Honor gave the tone of embarrassment. She looked distinctly wan, tired, nerveless. It must be the heat, this terrible, sunless heat that

one pretended to like in England, out of sheer gratitude to the weather-gods that it was not raining.

"It's sweltering!" said Neilson, who was disappointed at not finding the sun shining outside London.

"Hm-hm," agreed Honor, a cherry, about to fulfil its fate, delicately held in two fingers, "and the air is relaxing, too, to add to the pleasure. We'll go on the river after lunch."

They went on the river after lunch.

Neilson punted, while Solterre, who hated exercise at all times, played idly with a paddle—much to the annoyance of Neilson. The two girls lay back against the cushions and dipped their fingers in the water over the edge of the boat.

"I wish it would rain and get done with it," sighed Honor testily. "This glare is going to give me a headache."

"What?" asked Neilson, extricating his punt-pole from the bed of mud he had plunged it in. His hair fell forward into his eyes, and he shook it back. "'A house in the rain is worth two castles in Spain,'" he laughed. "I'm grateful even for this murk!"

"It'll probably thunder later," suggested Solterre. "It can't go on at a temperature of eighty-two!"

Christyn inspected Neilson through half-closed eyes and found him freshly attractive. This is what Neilson could be. He had changed into flannels, and his shirt was open at the neck; his hair was tousled. As he strained at the punt-pole she watched the moving muscles of his arms. His eyes were as blue as her own, here on the water, and he was grinning; his teeth gleamed as brightly as Banny's. He was very handsome. No wonder women had spoilt him. Dark hair and blue eyes: she would always like the com-

bination because of this, her first love. To-day he was so boyish ; this is where he belonged, away from towns, using his physical strength, the fine body God had given him. And he was gay, too, happy with his punt-pole, like a child with a new toy, not cynically gay, saying clever things, but lovable and in high spirits. She caught her breath with elation. Why could he not be like this always?

" George ! " she called softly.

He nearly dropped the punt-pole. " *What* did you call me ? "

" George. Don't you like it ? "

" Like it ? Well, I don't know—it just isn't me. What's wrong with Neilson ? "

" Not Neilson to-day, please. Neilson, poet and philanderer, you see. George is a dear boy . . . quite different. . . . "

" Don't, don't ! " he cried, tossing his hair again. The perspiration glistened on his forehead, two drops rolled down his temples ; his face was red with the exertion, and added to his childish appearance. He looked at Christyn with eyes that positively shone with affection and merriment.

" Bee-princess," he whispered to her, stooping as he pulled the punt-pole out of the water, " you are a darling."

Christyn's heart seemed to give a leap. She clenched her fists. It was the first time he had ever dropped his tone of formality with her. So that was what she had liked so much ? That eighteenth century tone of formality ? There had been no " darlings " and " dearests " in their speech with each other ; only once a poetic " beloved," and twice he had called her an angel. For the first time he had made use of the colloquial " darling " to her, and the thrill of it was

like an electric shock—if an electric shock could conceivably be pleasant. He had not cheapened the word by familiarity, and now he said it like a caress. A verbal kiss. Christyn started. In a moment she was kissing him, her arms were around his neck, his face was between her hands, her hands were in his hair, on his forehead. . . .

She stroked the water gently with her forefinger, unseeing eyes staring at the toe of her shoe. Then she gave herself a shake and looked up. She saw that he was watching her, that his nostrils quivered and his lips twitched. So it was contagious. He evidently perceived the floodgates he had unloosened, and was now himself overwhelmed by the torrent of passion. To hold her, to kiss her. She saw it plainly, and it made her put her hand to her head weakly and tremble. She turned away with a desire to weep; ashamed of herself for possessing such things as senses, yet proud of her newly-discovered maturity. She loved him very tenderly, appreciated deeply his strength for never having wooed her before. This is what he could do with just a look and a word. He must have known it, and yet he had never made use of his power, had always considered her happiness too valuable a thing to be staked for the pleasure of love. Oh, yes, he must have known how easy it would have been to make it difficult for her to turn him out of her life. He had given her every opportunity to escape him, although he had allowed her to know what he felt. "I love you, but I will not make you mine by conquest," had been his attitude.

He still punted vigorously. Solterre was talking to Honor about the evils of prohibition, a subject which invariably failed to interest her. She pulled her hat lower over her eyes and sighed again.

"Take us back, Neilson," she begged wearily, "the water is getting on my nerves."

Neilson took them back.

They had a late tea on the lawn underneath one of the chestnut trees, and remained there until it was time to dress for dinner. Christyn and Neilson sometimes glanced at each other with a momentary flicker of recognition and understanding, but otherwise had become polite fellow-guests once more. That always seemed to be the aftermath of any tenseness that passed between them. Christyn thought: "Is this, as a fact, always the aftermath of any tenseness that ever passes between two people?"

Honor was asked to extinguish the flame of methylated spirit which flickered beneath a silver tea-kettle. She stooped to blow, seized hold of the kettle and burnt herself. "Hell!" she exclaimed, and sucked her fingers. Her mother sent up a wail of indignation, and Honor retorted hysterically: "For God's sake . . ."

"Honor, must you swear?" lamented Mrs. Pembroke.

Honor did not reply, but turned to Solterre and the Princess Vladimir with a shrug.

Dinner was a distinctly sombre affair. The conversation was provided by Neilson, Solterre and the Princess, while Mrs. Pembroke threw in a few pitiable sentences every now and then, not to make the unhappiness her daughter filled her with too noticeable. Christyn, as was an unfortunate trait with her under such circumstances, could find nothing to talk about and did not try. They had coffee in the dining-room. As Honor swallowed the last mouthful, she leapt up and laid a hand on Solterre's shoulder.

She threw back her curls restively.

"Sol, I can't stand this stifling atmosphere any longer. There's thunder in the air, and it won't break. I must get out. Come for a walk."

Solterre agreed. Christyn and Neilson were doubtfully invited to join, but refused on the plea that walking would probably only make them hotter. The Princess offered to tell their fortunes by cards, and they sounded delighted. They followed Mrs. Pembroke to the drawing-room and grouped around a table; the Princess laid Christyn's cards, and Neilson watched. Mrs. Pembroke sat in an armchair and read the Sunday papers.

Out in the open, Honor strode ahead of Solterre.

"Don't walk so fast," warned Solterre, "or you'll boil."

Then he suggested that if she wanted to get cool, nothing in the world would be more suitable than a run in his car. The idea appealed to her, and they walked in silence to the garage. Solterre managed to drive out to the road with little difficulty, although the light was growing dim.

"Burnham Beeches," ordered Honor peremptorily.

"Right, Miss," said Solterre, touching his brow with his forefinger playfully, in the manner of a taxicab driver. He was sensitive to her strange uneasiness.

"I'm going to let her go," stated Solterre, after they had driven for about a quarter of an hour, "she can do sixty comfortably here."

"She?"

"The bus—car, I mean. It'll be nice to have the wind blowing us about."

They sped on to the roar of the engine. But soon Honor yelled: "Hi! This terrifies me. Shut up, Sol!" and Sol slackened the pace.

Presently Honor said :

"Mother's shocked. I'm truly sorry for her. She ought to have had a daughter like Vivyan Tempest. I only make her miserable, and we fight all the time."

"A pity." Solterre drove the car at a rate of forty miles per hour.

"Princess Vladimir isn't shocked. And she's tactful."

"Is she?"

"Yes. This morning she saw at once that I didn't want to talk about Sergei."

"Who?"

"Sergei Semyonovitch Prokofieff."

"Who on earth's that?"

"Haven't you met him at the studio? I thought you knew all my . . . friends."

"The Russian sculptor with the squashed nose! I know. Why didn't you want to talk about him?"

No answer. A whole minute elapsed before Solterre resumed :

"You were rather taken with him this Spring, weren't you? Then you dropped him all of a sudden. And Prince what's-his-name, the son of that Grand-duke."

"Prince What's-his-name, as you call him, proposed to me one night, and when I refused him went straight to mother and tried it on her. Curiously enough mother refused the offer." She gave a short laugh.

"And the sculptor? What happened to him?"

"He's in Paris, I believe," said Honor slowly, in a dazed kind of manner.

"Tell me."

"Do you want to know?" She was so listless now

that she barely moved her lips at all. For an instant she looked as if she were going to faint. "I feel sick," she confessed. Then: "Let me tell you."

Solterre drove much more slowly and looked at her closely. Her voice sounded tired, as if her throat were contracted. He found it all rather eerie; beautiful Honor, so desperately unhappy about something. A dark-blue car on a lonely road with two hatless and coatless young people in it, driving along in the half-light. He found it eerie, even though he was one of actors in the scene.

"You see," whispered Honor in a husky voice that inflamed Solterre with pity, "it all started with my ideals. It was helped by my curiosity, and brought to a head by my sensuality"

"Honor darling, what are you saying?"

"No, no, I'm going to be ruthless. You know what I think about marriage; that I think conventional morality and selfishness walk hand in hand in these things. We . . . he was . . . in love with me and passionate, and there was no prospect of our getting married for ages. A little bit like Christyn and Neilson, except that I would have married him later. You see, I loved him . . ." she clapped her hands to her face and shuddered.

Solterre stopped the car at the side of the road, took her on his knees and pressed her head against his breast. She told the rest of the story into his coat.

"So you see my principles began it. All very noble, don't you know. I wasn't going to let the man I loved go through hell because I wanted to feel smug. But I'm not going to pretend that my curiosity and sensuality didn't help it on. Oh, my God!" She buried her face more deeply into his coat.

He stroked her hair in a frenzy of compassion. A powerful touring-car whizzed past them.

"Do you regret it so much?" he asked. "You oughtn't to regret such courage."

"No, no! It isn't anything of that sort I regret. I still believe in what I did, I would do it again because I believe in it. I'm not sorry!" She looked up savagely.

"Then you mustn't accuse yourself of beastly vices like curiosity and . . ."

"Oh, but do you think that Christyn, for instance, would have gone that far? And it isn't lack of courage; it's because she's essentially virginal and one feels it, whereas I——" she broke off, as tears like those one sheds in excess of physical pain suddenly started to her eyes.

Solterre rocked her. "Honor, darling, darling, I can't bear to see you suffer like this. Why didn't you tell me before? Why are you so unhappy about it?"

"Sergei ran away," was all she could say. In all her life she had never been so totally miserable. She listened to her agony, drank it in great draughts like poison, steeped herself in it, tore herself with it.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Solterre, horrified as if he had been struck, as if this last piece of information was the most terrible climax she could have produced. This was Honor, his proud friend, humiliated beyond endurance.

"What in the world is so hellish as making a fool of oneself? He went off to Paris just after my birthday. He discovered his mistake. I was too American, too much the 'top-dog.' As a matter of fact he didn't even explain. He's like that—interesting and

taciturn. And the odd thing is that my passion for him went out like a flame that's had water poured on it. I'm absolutely detached about him now. Thank God for that, at least!"

Solterre dried her face with his handkerchief.

"But now I'm flotsam," she continued, a little more composed after the face-wiping, "and I feel a darned fool. But my principles haven't proved wrong. It's just accidental that Sergei behaved like that."

She looked up at Solterre; turned her head so that her cheek rested on his shirt-front. His face was white with rage, and he was muttering "swine" and "cad" and "hound" at intervals. Then he asked:

"Any danger of your having a baby?"

"Good God, no! I saw to that. It wouldn't have been fair to the child, would it? Duty to posterity and all that sort of thing." She made a pitiful effort to laugh. "Oh, I'm no saint or poor victim. I had my eyes open all right, only something went wrong."

He stooped and kissed her eyes, then remained deeply in thought, while he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with the back of his hand. Then he started the car again. It had grown very dark by now.

"We'd better get back. That infernal thunder-storm must happen soon."

She slid off his knees, and he turned the car round.

"You'd better marry me, I think," he said sternly and with great deliberation. "You damn well need looking after."

"You're not in love with me."

"Haven't you had enough of 'in-loveness' yet?" he demanded unfeelingly.

"I'm not in love with you. It wouldn't be fair. Some day you'd fall in love, and where would I be then?" She shook her head.

"Now don't be silly. Love is a governable impulse, with controlled people, just like any other. It's when people are uncontrolled in more or less every way, or when they're immature that they let it run away with them. I'm a tame person, I regret to say—I do regret it because I can imagine the thrill of being swept off one's feet, although I've never felt it. I'm nearly twenty-six, and I don't believe I'm born to be a great lover or I'd have tried it long ago. You've had your *grande passion*, and it's burnt you out. . . ."

"Oh, I can't bear this, Sol!" she cried. "You talk like an essay!" She wept.

"For Christ's sake let me finish!" Solterre was a little on edge. "We've too much in common to make a mess of it. Don't cry, Honor. All this sounds horribly matter-of-fact in words, but if you reflect that it's based on the feeling that made me take you on my knees just now, perhaps you'll see that we may be happy together. But I'm not going to kid you into thinking I'm in love with you in the way you—or I—understand being in love. If you were perfectly happy and I were as I am, I shouldn't dream of asking you to marry me, because of someone else you might meet. But I love you in exactly the same shade as I love Christyn; I love your company, I love your looks, and I feel towards you as towards an orphan child whom I'd been given the opportunity of adopting. I want to pick you up and nurse you like a little wounded bird. You need nursing and unruffling, and if we didn't marry I wouldn't be able to boss you and take care of you."

Another car passed them. Honor sighed, and blew her nose in Solterre's handkerchief.

"Dear Sol," she returned with another sigh, "all this sounds most heroic. Would you marry Christyn under the circumstances?"

"I don't think so—I don't know. I don't imagine her under the circumstances." He continued with renewed cruelty: "She's different from you, not so thoughtless or so sensational."

"For God's sake don't bully me!" she cried.

Sol flung an arm around her roughly. This made her laugh, and they swerved suddenly.

"I'll marry you, Sol," she told him, and as she said it the tears started to her eyes again, "but I can't describe what I feel for you. It's not love anyway."

"Nor me for you. It's just friendship—or something like it," he replied with gloom.

"Let's pretend we're happy," she suggested miserably. She wept again. "Why the hell doesn't that storm break?" she sobbed. "I wish I were dead."

"You don't. And while I'm here you won't die either."

An ominous rumbling seemed to travel up the road behind them, seemed to catch them up, and then crash just beside them. After a terribly short interval, the world around them was lit up fiercely for the fraction of a second. Then it was pitch dark again. Solterre put his foot on the accelerator and swore.

"The storm, thank God!" breathed Honor, "but I'm terrified."

For all her gratitude to the thunder and lightning, there was no rain, which added considerably to the oppression. Honor shivered. There was something

so sinister in this black, wrathful rainlessness that when the second thunder-clap occurred she shrieked.

"Shut up!" commanded Solterre, now at the end of his tether. He forgot to treat her as a woman, forgot Honor's elegant, æsthetic friend the Viscount de Solterre, remembered only that he was a male and that she must not hinder him; but with the second flash of lightning he again unearthed his civilized self, and yelled his apologies to her.

She, Honor, the modern student of Nature, amateur psychologist and theorist, clung in terror to Solterre as they raced along the road in the night.

At the house Mrs. Pembroke had gone up to bed early, leaving her guests to their own devices.

The Princess Vladimir told Christyn's fortune:

"You are surrounded by four men—the four Kings. I don't think they are all lovers by any means, but they are all important factors in your life. Give me three more. There. You will hear of an engagement——"

"Banny," observed Christyn in an aside to Neilson.

"... And it will come as a great surprise."

"Will it? I think I know of it already."

The Princess turned up a series of spades and clubs which gave the fortune an air of evil foreboding. She exclaimed, "Dear me!"

"What's that?" asked Christyn, frightened at the sight of so many black cards. In the electric atmosphere they struck her as uncanny. To add to the general cheerlessness an owl screeched outside. No one spoke. The Princess turned up another card, and then the nine of spades lay beside the ace of spades. This combination made her start, and she gave Christyn a quick glance.

"You are going to quarrel," she began, "no—not quarrel, but you are going to part with these four kings, and yet you are not going on a journey. It is most curious. Then I have here the card of death, and yet no one is going to die. It is difficult to interpret. I don't understand the cards myself—to-night."

Christyn gave a little spasmodic shiver. "Someone walking over my grave!" she quoted without real gaiety.

Neilson laughed. "We *are* becoming a merry party!" he bantered, but he found himself feeling none too lively himself.

"It's the cards," maintained the Princess, "they always affect me, and I am so ppsychic that I can affect my surroundings."

"It's the climate, if you ask me," Christyn returned, "and I wish it weren't so suffocating."

"It mustn't rain before Honor and Sol are back," reminded Neilson.

The Princess turned up a diamond. "The card of separation!" she sighed.

Christyn all at once hated this fortune-telling. It depressed her, but she was too polite to say so. The owl screeched again.

Neilson told himself he was amused. Amused at the way in which his two companions could be swayed by purely external influences. An oncoming thunderstorm, an unusually black night, an owl—and there they were already shuddering.

But the Princess was becoming genuinely distressed at the cards. They were blacker than ever; she had never seen them like that before.

"Death," she repeated, "and yet I don't see how . . ."

"Death," mused Neilson aloud, "is one of the

most expressive words in the English language. It is the end of all things—death. It can strike terror into the hearts of the most religious by its mere sound. Listen to it: death, death, death.”

“Don’t, Neilson.” Christyn laid a hand quite gently on his knee. “You mustn’t interrupt, you know!” He twitched, and she withdrew her hand. “But I do think the Princess is seeing things in retrospect. My mother died, you see, about a year ago.”

“Perhaps,” said the Princess, “but I do not generally tell the past. Here I have a dark young man who is very sad and lonely. You are turning your face away from him—that is you, here, the queen of hearts—and it causes him great sorrow. You are not happy yourself.”

“This is too much!” Christyn laughed uneasily. “You had better stop telling my fortune and tell Neilson’s instead.”

“I have nearly come to the end of it, anyway,” replied the Princess. “There is very little more to tell. You must cut and wish.”

Christyn obeyed, and the Princess spread half the pack before her.

“Yes, your wish comes out,” she prophesied, “but only after some difficulty, as you notice.”

“That’s nice! I wished for happiness.”

“I will tell you yours now,” said the Princess, turning to Neilson.

“Thank you,” replied Neilson gravely. He glanced at the clock. “What’s the matter with Honor and Sol?” he asked. “They’ve gone for a pretty long walk.”

“They haven’t gone for a walk at all, surely?” Christyn looked at him in surprise. “I’m sure I

heard the sound of Sol's car shortly after they left. He's taken her for a drive."

"Oh," said Neilson.

"You are very ppsychic," the Princess Vladimir was telling him, "and your cards are most extraordinary."

A loud clap of thunder interrupted her. Christyn waited for the lightning, then looked out of the window, then frowned at Neilson.

"Honor and Sol," she murmured. "I don't like it at all."

"Ouf, a thunderstorm!" exclaimed the Princess, pulling a face. "How I hate them!"

"I should like it to pour, and then I'd like to go out on the roof with nothing . . ." Neilson began.

"Neilson," warned Christyn, who sympathized with him but felt that the Princess would be shocked.

". . . Nothing in the world to worry about," concluded Neilson, a twinkle in his eye.

The second clap of thunder disturbed Christyn very much. She jumped up and pulled the curtains. "It's not raining," she announced. "I wish Honor and Sol were back. These beastly thunderbolts are falling in such quick succession, it quite frightens me."

"Let's hear all about my future," Neilson soothed them, "and possess our souls in patience. The Princess was just beginning to tell me the most marvellous things."

"I wonder how long it will last?" The Princess fidgeted.

"What, telling my fortune?"

"No, no, that horrid thunderstorm!"

Christyn drew their attention to the fact that it had not really begun yet.

"Honor and Sol," she persisted. "I wish they were back!"

"Bejabbers!"

A really formidable crash seemed to burst the roof over them. A brittle, smashing sound that was alarming in its nearness. Christyn put her hands to her ears. The Princess was horrified and completely unnerved; she made the sign of the Cross three times.

"Neilson," Christyn's agitation had increased, "I wish Honor and Sol would hurry!"

"Yes." This time Neilson agreed. He did not in the least enjoy the thought of anyone being out of doors at that moment. It was no use laughing it off with a show of bravado; but he said he thought they would arrive all right.

Christyn wished the Princess's fortune-telling had put them in a less melancholy frame of mind. Death, death, death. It was a nasty thought. How did one ever know that one had the right to laugh at such omens? Sol and Honor out in a car on a pitch black night with a storm practically overhead. What if something went wrong with the lights of Sol's car? The idea made her hair bristle, and she looked apprehensively at Neilson. Death, the Princess had predicted. Her skin stiffened into what is commonly called "goose-flesh." Then she told herself not to be a silly fool. Aloud she said, flippantly: "The thing I admire about Christyn de Solterre is her admirable self-control!"

"So do I," answered Neilson seriously.

They waited in silence. Then they heard movement in the room above them.

"That is Mrs. Pembroke," the Princess explained. "Her bedroom is just on top of this room. I suppose she will come down again."

"Listen!" Christyn held up a finger.

They could hear the buzzing of a motor-car. Yes, it was Sol all right. Thank God, oh thank God! Christyn uttered a prayer of thanksgiving, and collapsed into an armchair. The relief was almost as hard to bear as the strain had been, and needed at least as much strength of character.

"I hope to heavens they'll be here before Mrs. Pembroke comes down," said Neilson.

Fortunately his prayer was answered, for within a very few minutes Honor and Solterre entered the room. Honor was livid and exceedingly dishevelled. Solterre, however, was laughing.

"Have you ever come across anything like it?" he exclaimed. "This reminds me of the 'Ancient Mariner'!"

"Thank God, oh, thank God!" whispered Christyn fervently.

"And it isn't even raining yet," said Honor. "It's too gruesome for words!"

"The wrath of the heavens. God is angry!" proclaimed Neilson.

Mrs. Pembroke entered the room. She was in her dressing-gown, and a pale yellow boudoir-cap covered her curling-pins.

"Please, dear God"—Christyn folded her hands piously—"don't be angry but sorry, and weep a little. We need your tears."

"That's beautiful!" Neilson cried. He improvised:

"Chastise us not, O Lord,
Thy sinful children supplicate:
Let this Thy cruel storm abate
That fills us with a thousand fears.
'Tis not Thy wrath we need. We need Thy tears."

"It shall be written and called 'Prayer during Storm,' you see, Bee-princess. . . ."

Another clap of thunder.

"There's for your prayer!" scoffed Solterre.

But suddenly they all stood still. Neilson listened attentively, then turned to Solterre with an expression of great triumph. "Do you hear?" he chuckled with childish exultance.

Rain began to beat against the windows.

"This is a most extraordinary thing!" said the Princess Vladimir. "I am sure that young man is ppsychic."

It was midnight by now.

CHAPTER XIX

TERRY

ON Monday morning, Christyn, Solterre and Neilson returned to London. The party at the Pembrokes' had sat up until past two o'clock the night before, at which hour the storm had eventually subsided. The air was cool, and this time Christyn sat beside Neilson, who drove instead of Solterre. The three of them barely spoke to one another, each lost in his own individual reverie. Only once, Christyn said to Neilson :

"I am coming to the studio this afternoon. You can expect me."

Solterre was bewildered by the happening of the night before. With a sense of shame he felt that the thunderstorm was probably responsible for the fact that he had asked Honor to marry him. The thunderstorm and pity. Oh, he was weak whenever there was cause for pity. Last night he was quite beside himself with pity for that broken-hearted, lovely sylph whom he had always liked so much for her very hardness. And yet he felt queerly happy, as if he had, at last, found a definite purpose in his existence. Collecting first editions was not a purpose.

Christyn, wrapped in a mantle of impervious meditation, sped through years of bliss, seated beside Neilson in Solterre's car. To go on, and on, and on, and never think about time; to rush through

the air in perfect silence with the beloved by one's side, and because time meant nothing and had lost its preciousness, to allow oneself the luxury of not speaking. There is no to-morrow, and one is ever on the eve of some enormous crisis. Mayhap the crisis is some entombing cataclysm, mayhap a death-depriving joy.

Neilson shared Christyn's mood. He, too, refused to think of anything but the present. Here she sat, safe, and for a fleeting hour, at his very own disposal. He need only turn to her and speak and she must listen. There are things one can never take away, experiences nothing can erase, and this is one of them. It does not matter what happens afterwards, but this drive is locked in his memory, and unless he wishes it, can never be displaced.

The Solterres brought him as far as the studio, then drove back to Mayfair. Christyn reminded him softly of her intention to visit him during the afternoon.

Having waved them off, he opened the squeaky gate. He had almost forgotten that the gate squeaked. He discovered that he had almost forgotten everything about the studio. It was mid-day and yet the place was still with the stillness of somnolence. He came across Gaby in the kitchen, disconsolately depositing a trayful of dirty breakfast crockery on the ledge by the sink. Parnell, so his brother informed him, was dressing in the bathroom.

"Terry's gone," said Gaby, picking up a kipper-skin which had fallen on the floor.

"Gone?" Neilson echoed, eyeing the kipper-skin thoughtfully. ("Kipperred herring? I'd like to be a lily!") Visions of a frosty day in December, of a pitiable little figure, hurrying ashamedly down the

street, of something within his reach, yet in another world.)

Gaby said about Terry: "He's found a job to sing at a cinema every night for ten and six a performance."

Neilson roared with laughter. That really tickled him to death.

"He came back last night," Gaby went on, "not drunk but sodden. Drunk's too mild a word. It was the third time this week, and both Parnell and I were sick of him. He was forcibly ejected by Parnell at nine o'clock last night."

"I'm sorry Terry's gone," sighed Neilson, "that's the end of him, and he did cook decently." Poor old Terry, the spirit of the studio in very truth.

"Yes, what he cooked, but call his bills of fare *menus*? Great Scot! He fed us on cakes every day for a week. Sand cakes, madeira, seed-cakes, chocolate-cakes. Then we got nothing but vegetables for a fortnight. Then suddenly he conceived a passion for mayonnaise and we had to eat the stuff with everything."

"Poor Terry. Still he was a genius and we'll not find another like him."

"No, thank God," grumbled Gaby. Then his face lit up as he remembered something. "Besides, I suppose I shall be out of it. Look"—his hand dived into the pocket of his dressing-gown and drew out a letter which he presented to Neilson.

It was an offer to go to America, from an American manager, with the play in which he was now acting. A brilliant offer. Neilson looked up. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to discuss it with my agent this

afternoon. I think it would be a jolly good thing, don't you? Increase my public."

"Yes," said Neilson slowly. Poor old studio. Terry gone, Gaby thinking of going, too. Only he and Parnell left. That means he is tied to Parnell for all times. Bejabers, but Fate is swinish to him.

Parnell entered the kitchen. "Hullo, heard our news?"

"You mean about Gaby?"

"Yes, and Terry. He was blind drunk. I'm afraid he'll be going to the dogs for good and all now, but we couldn't put up with it any longer."

"After all, we're not a reformatory for inebriates," Gaby concluded.

"No," said Neilson dully. He went to a cupboard and fetched out a broom and dust-pan. "And we'll have to get a charwoman for the time being." The cupboard, Neilson noted, smelt musty. Dirt. Dirt.

"What on earth are you going to do with those?" asked Gaby.

A broad and indulgent smile grew on Neilson's face. He picked up a large duster and draped it around Gaby's shoulders.

"A little exercise will do us a world of good, my friend. You can do the dusting while I ply this broom. The dirt in the studio is simply nauseous. I've become holy. Were you never taught that cleanliness was next to Godliness?"

"Holy Mary, Mother of God!" groaned Parnell, running his fingers through his hair, "he'll be sending us to a Bible-class soon!"

"Very likely. An excellent piece of reading, the Bible," returned Neilson.

"Neilson, your night out's done you no good.

You're foul this morning." Parnell was sincerely disgusted.

"Bumptious and superior," added Gaby.

"Good Lord, I'm not going to sweep the studio because I want to be good, but because I think I'm going to enjoy it. Strange thought, I've never swept out the studio before." He left the kitchen and began his business of cleaning.

"Mister Neilson, now *you're* a gent, gent. I'm afther ass-asskin' for you all evening."

Neilson, astonished, swung round and beheld Terry, very pink in the face, with his hat on, very dapper as to dress.

"They turned me out last noight," Terry proceeded in nasal tones, "tellin' me Oi was drunk. Now I wasn't drunk at all, at all. And let me tell you this, sir, let me tell you this: Oi'm not drunk now, though many'd be afther thinkin' Oi am."

"Aren't you?"

"No," maintained Terry stoutly, "Oi'm not."

"Take your hat off and sit down."

Terry obeyed him with unaccustomed meekness.

"Oi've had a drop, Oi'll admit, but Oi'm not really toight. Reely, Oi'm not."

"No, but you've completely lost control of yourself. Pull yourself together."

Terry made a visible effort. "Oi'll swear to you that Oi know what Oi'm talking about, sir, Oi'll swear it."

Neilson watched him with interest. It was true; Terry did know what he was saying. There was an obvious conflict between one side of Terry's brain and a part of him which was submerged in liquor. His appearance was tidy, his flaxen hair plastered down

with water, a gay handkerchief peeping from his cuff.

"So you know what you're talking about, do you?" Neilson resumed, "then why do you tell lies about not having been drunk last night?"

"Och, Mister Neilson, don't be hard on a poor devil as had a moighty t'irst on him!" Terry pleaded. "Sure Oi was a bit in the drink lasst noight, but now they've gone and turned me out, and that'll be the end o' Terry O'Bryan." He prodded Neilson's chest with his forefinger as he spoke. "Sure you'll not let me go now, after all them years Oi've been a fait'ful servant to you and all?" His face took on a harassed expression.

"You should have thought of that earlier, Terry. Seems to me your method of being a faithful servant is to sponge on us thoroughly, trust to our good-nature, and take your responsibilities very lightly."

"Oi've always been most devoted to you, Mister Neilson." Tears sprang into Terry's eyes. "Most."

"Pull yourself together and don't get maudlin. If you were as devoted as that you'd have taken care not to live in a state of permanent intoxication."

"Give me another try," urged Terry, his fear hastening the process of sobriety, "Oi'll never touch a drop again."

"That's a lie," quoth Neilson cheerfully, "and it hardly seems right that I should be so sentimental as to take you back after Mr. Parnell has taken the trouble to turn you out. If you like, you can begin your reformation by making this room fit to live in. Then we'll see. First of all, go and wash your face in cold water."

"Mister Neilson," Terry stood up and took a deep breath, "Oi knew you were a reel gent." He could

not help a few tears. " Oi'll never forget this, never. God bless you, sir, God bless you. Oi'm a saved man."

" That's all right. Now get to work, and try not to let the others see you just yet. They've got to get used to the shock of having you back again. God knows it must have been difficult to get rid of you."

Neilson relinquished his broom and dust-pan. Good old Terry was back again. Long live the studio!

He retired to his own room and began to write a poem. Presently Gaby went in to him. Neilson put down his pen and said : " Well? "

" Terry's back," answered Gaby in an aggrieved tone of voice.

" I know. We'll never get rid of him. You ought to know that by now."

" It's rather offensive to us."

" What about last time I turned him out, and Parnell took him back out of patriotism? "

" Well, if he misbehaves again, you can get rid of him yourself."

" Right-o. In the meantime he's working."

Gaby left Neilson. Neilson worked until twenty minutes to two.

Luncheon consisted of tinned salmon (with mayonnaise), a cucumber, a few tomatoes, lettuce and a basket of strawberries.

After luncheon Parnell, who intended going abroad for the summer, went to town to arrange about his passport; Gaby visited his agents over the American project. This left Neilson alone in the studio. Terry, now restored to the kitchen, warbled happily among his pots and pans. His head felt as heavy as an inflated football, but he dared not neglect showing how much he appreciated his return.

Neilson sat before his window, attempting with difficulty not to be impatient. Christyn, Christyn. Why was she coming so suddenly, so daringly? The way she had told him: "I am coming to the studio this afternoon. You can expect me." Just like that—no challenge or suggestion of self-condemnation at her rather surprising audacity. She was exceedingly young; so young that, had she been a flower, she would still be a bud. It made Neilson feel sorry. She was only a child, and perhaps she did not know anything about anything. He wished, for her sake, that she had never come to the studio, that she had never had to meet all Sol's friends and his. Then he remembered with a shock that as far as that was concerned, she must have come into contact with many more unappetizing types under Eleanor Martinez's and Phillipa's *régime* than she would ever meet even here in the studio. Therefore it was her own quality, that aroma of untouchedness. She made him afraid. How did one deal with purity like hers? One hated to teach certain things to some people. He brushed his hair, then went into the studio to make sure that it was tidy. The piano was open, and he struck a chord. How would they meet to-day, he and Christyn? He realized that he did not know her at all, that she knew less than nothing about him, except what her sure instinct for character had led her to understand. Once she had said to him: "There are very few kinds of people, really. The ones who are seekers, who are inquisitive, and the ones who have found, who are religious. One or two odd people are complete potatoes, and one or two have temperaments, and no intellects." Another time she had said: "There aren't any rules of conduct except tact. If one knows a person by using tact, then one builds up one's entire

behaviour to him, involuntarily, on that basis. Nice people are never themselves all the time. They vary according to the people they are with." In that case, he, Neilson, was a nice person. He could not help being a mirror to a creature like Christyn, even on pain of hypocrisy. She herself had admitted to the fine hair that lay between tact and hypocrisy. It was only tact itself, or intuition, that could distinguish between the two; there was no rule.

He could hear the noise of a taxicab before the door. So she had taken a taxi? He ran into the little front hall to let her in himself. She was paying the driver; then she turned and walked, with exasperating slowness, into the house. Terry poked his head out of the kitchen, but swiftly withdrew again with a gurgle that made Neilson wonder whether he had not treated himself to another bottle of beer.

"Bee-princess," Neilson warned, "I am here alone. Only Terry in the kitchen." He felt it would be merely fair to bring the fact home to her.

"That's perfect," she replied, and sailed into the studio. She looked about her, then sat down in an armchair by the fireplace. "I'm glad I've come," she told him, "because for a long time I've wanted to do something naughty. This is naughty, you know, and yet quite harmless, because there's at least the Atlantic Ocean between us at this moment. It's as if we had never seen each other before, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Neilson, staring at her.

"There are a hundred years between this morning and now . . . aren't there?"

"Yes, because this morning I was in your world, which I'm quite used to, whereas now you're in mine, where you're a stranger."

She laughed. "You weren't in my world at all this

morning! I have not got a world of my own. Only I'm intrigued by your world." She wrinkled her brow. "I'm intrigued by lots of things."

Neilson noticed that she had a few freckles on her nose and that her mouth looked redder than usual. She wore a plain white dress that took the lines of her figure when she moved. Her shoes, and the trimming on her dress were black, and there was some black embroidery on her hat.

"What intrigues you?" he asked.

"Men," came the reply, promptly. She began taking off her gloves very slowly, finger by finger.

"What do you want to know?"

"What they feel. Whether, for instance, it is wrong of me—wrong to you to have come here like this now."

"Who put that thought into your head?"

"Honor."

"Oh *well!*" exclaimed Neilson, as if that explained everything. "Honor? Oh *well!*" He watched her a little, then said: "I wonder how much you are still quite a child? What would surprise you and what you would take for granted in life?"

She wondered too. How far was Honor right in declaring that men were more at the mercy of their animal instincts than anyone supposed? Was Neilson now controlling himself—like yesterday on the river—or was there no necessity for control? How much power had she to make him a beast or let him be a man? She rose, and walked over to the piano, sat down and let her fingers wander over the keyboard in an arpeggio.

Neilson asked her to sing to him.

"Certainly," she consented, "I should love to. It's at moments like this that I love singing. Parnell

wrote me such a darling little song the other day. Listen to this." She played the opening passage, while Neilson stood where he could get a better view of her, away from the dais.

Then she turned to him again: "By the way, aren't you loving this, all this, I mean? I'm playing that we belong here . . . that I belong here, I mean; and that we aren't strangers; that it's quite natural for me to be sitting here like this." She stopped talking abruptly and began to sing. It was a romantic little melody set to some well-known lines of Shelley's.

"The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the day for the morrow . . ."

sang Christyn in a clear, even voice that had not yet quite lost its childishness.

When she had finished, she looked up and saw Neilson standing beside her. Thud, thud, thud, went her heart now because he stood so near her.

"Christyn!"

"What is it?" A tremendous, marvellous fear had fallen like a cloak upon her. He was in her hands now, her responsibility. It depended upon her whether this visit was to turn into the romance she craved for or merely an escapade to shock Aunt Amelia. It was too much for her to throw away her romance. Her romance must not peter out so meanly.

"What are we, Neilson?"

"I only know what I desire most in all the world we should be," he answered her; he realized he was unable to keep a vibration from his voice, "if I were not afraid of distressing you."

"Why should I be distressed by our . . . being simply honest?"

"You are so young."

"Not too young!" Having sprung up, she stood thinking a moment. "You see, I don't know how much I have to be afraid of—for you."

He took her hand and gently, gently, drew her into his arms. It was never to be told in years to come that the lovers, Christyn and Neilson, had not embraced. As he leant forward to kiss her, Christyn put the palm of her hand against his mouth.

"Please, Neilson dear," she begged, "kiss me very nicely and make me happy. I have never been kissed before, so this will be my initiation."

She had never been kissed before. This was to make exquisite or mar the thought of a kiss to her. He was her first love, and she was purer than a flower. She was quite, quite beautiful and fragile, and her mouth looked like wax. And she was quaint and honest and her eyes were dewy. Yet for all this, he must not go mad, he must not go mad because she must not be frightened. When she spoke to him quaintly, like that, she almost drove him to distraction.

She waited for his kiss. Now, now. . . . Oh, God . . . abandon. . . . When he had kissed her, she laughed at him exquisitely. "You do think I'm a little child, don't you?"

This was too provoking. He kissed her then, without thinking of her.

"Please, Neilson . . . please!" Always that holding back, for no reason at all. It was pleasure to her.

"I love you."

"I love you too." But Christyn, bewildered, whispered. Her voice sounded oddly terrified.

"I want never to let you go. I want you here always because I shall have eternal joy in watching you always be a stranger!"

"You'll get sick of the stranger!" But now her exultance swept over her like a perfume.

"Then you'll suddenly make me feel I know you. And you're beautiful; God, you're so beautiful!" Neilson pressed his forehead against her shoulder.

"I know I shall always adore you. These are one of the things one knows. One knows when one is sincere. I know when I am sincere."

He kissed her again and again. Drank great draughts of unforgettable bliss from her lips, hoarded his joy of her. Consciously she spun out each moment, and when thoughts came to her, she thrust them aside violently.

"And, Neilson," she said into his ear, "they can't take this away from us ever, can they? I mean this is, however much life may hurt us in the future."

"No, never," he replied, "nor shall anything ever efface my thankfulness that you exist and that I know you."

For an infinity of thirty seconds, they held each other. Then she spoke: "I'm glad I love you, and that I'm not very clever. I should hate to be so intelligent that I couldn't love stupidly and without reserve like this. Perhaps some day I shall be so wise that I'll be able to analyse love and know just how much to give and how much will only tire you. Now my only happiness is to watch your pleasure."

"You need never use your intelligence for that, because your pride will always guide you."

"Have I pride?"

"Boundless. You could never be fond of anyone who did not show a keen interest in you first."

"And still," Christyn confessed, "I don't yet know what things are 'done' and what things are 'said'—do I?"

"I've never noticed anything about you but your amazing candour. You either say nothing at all, or you hit the bull's eye."

Christyn held his hand to her cheek. "Silence is sometimes the greatest lie of all. And ever so often I say nothing." She fondled his hand a little longer, then slipped back to the piano.

The telephone-bell rang loudly, a rude and jagged tear in the web of ecstasy they had woven themselves. Neilson heard Terry run to answer it.

"What is it, Terry?" he called, going to the door.

As Terry appeared, Neilson knew at once that he must have been celebrating his return to No. 16 in his own fashion. He could scarcely walk properly, his face was crimson, and there was a distinctly bellicose air about him. Neilson grew definitely annoyed.

"Miss Mart—Martini on the 'phone," Terry hiccupped, "and she says she mush—must shpeak to ye."

"Go and hang up the receiver," Neilson said sternly, "and don't let me see you in here again in that condition."

"Miss Mart—Martini says she's gotta shpeak to ye. Most im-portant."

"It's all right, Neilson," Christyn reassured him, "I'm not afraid of Terry."

Neilson looked at Terry uncertainly, then thinking it wiser not to have a scene in front of Christyn, went to the telephone which was in the hall. Terry's eyes followed him as he left the studio, then he grinned, winked, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the door.

"He's talkin' to his best gurrl!" he said, knowing perfectly well that he was being spiteful. He resented being told off before Lady Christyn. "He useta

think a lot of her at one toime. Oi suppose she's ringin' him up to condole with him about Miss Singe—Singe—St. John."

"Please, Terry," Christyn answered him coldly, "I'm not in the least bit interested."

Terry laughed disagreeably. "Oh, but Oi'm thinkin' it's best you should know all about it. It's damn funny, you can take it from me. Only a little while ago, Miss Mart—Martini was here, and she cryin' an' all, and Mister Neilson comfortin' her with kisses and promises——"

"Terry!"

"Oi was listenin' at the door, so Oi heard it all. Then later comes Miss Singe—Singe Sparrow. She throws herself at him, only this toime he's not havin' any. So what does she do but go an' swallow a bottle of shoe-polish to troy an' commit soocide——"

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Well, you'd better jest ask Mister Neilson, an' he'll tell you quick an' sure enough. Oi'll tell ye again if ye loike?"

"No, you won't. You're drunk and you don't know what you're saying. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Mebbe Oi am drunk, but it's the truth Oi'm tellin' ye. It's a cryin' shame him carryin' on with a sweet gurr! loike yerself, and then leadin' a poor creature loike Miss Martini to believe he'll be her lover——"

Neilson re-entered the studio. Christyn ran to him.

"Neilson, Terry's so terribly drunk, he's saying the most abominable things about you!"

"Let him say it's a lie then!" Terry exclaimed wildly. "He won't have the face to deny a single word Oi've been tellin' ye!"

"What have you been telling her?" Neilson

seized him furiously by the collar, "you sodden scum of the earth!"

"Oi been tellin' her the truth about you!" shouted Terry, struggling. "You lemme go, sir! Oi've been tellin' how you made love to Miss Martini, huggin' her and kissin' her, an' how the Sparrow drank the shoe-polish on your account! You tell her it's a lie if you aren't afraid of facin' your Maker!"

"Of course it's a lie, you filthy sot!" Neilson shook him and flung him out of the studio and banged the door after him.

Christyn was staring stonily at a piano leg. Her face was white and she was perfectly motionless. Neilson grew afraid. She did not look up when he came back to her. She knew that Terry had spoken the truth. Terry's thoughts could never have been sufficiently coherent to enable him to invent this kind of thing.

"Of course Terry told the truth, Neilson. I know he did; I don't know why I know it, but I just do. So please tell me all about it, as if I were a rational human being, and expect me to understand—because I will."

Neilson did not know what to say. His intention had been to hide himself behind the adage that it was crueller to cause suffering by easing one's conscience, than to bear one's own burdens in silence. And here came this girl who calmly took for granted something he had planned to brush aside as ridiculous.

"Christyn—how can I tell you?"

"Quite simply, please. With no frills. About Phillipa first, please."

He told her about Phillipa. He tried to relate what had taken place one afternoon in the studio after his quarrel with Christyn. But somehow, as if in a night-

mare, his sentences sounded wrong or he chose unfortunate words, for he could only make himself appear a villain, or, at best, a wretched weakling. His behaviour in retrospect looked unforgivable. The whole story sounded so much worse told than acted.

"And you let Phillipa go home thinking that it was all right between you?" Christyn said in a calm voice that held no surprise. "Please don't try to spare me. I'd rather know."

"I said anything to make her stop crying, and to get rid of her."

"This was after Honor's dance? After you had told me that . . . you loved me? That day we quarrelled?" (Why was the word "love" always an embarrassing one to say? felt Christyn.)

He confessed: "Yes."

"And Aline St. John?"

"That wasn't really any fault of mine." Neilson caught hold of the truth greedily. "I am not responsible for a man-mad creature like the Sparrow. It was a mere accident that it wasn't Parnell who drove her to it." Thank God this was the truth for once!

"I can see that," admitted Christyn, "but," she added, "the Sparrow had been your mistress, I believe, hadn't she?"

So she knew that. Neilson's relief vanished again.

"As well as a crowd of other men," he replied.

"She was not famous for her constancy."

"But Phillipa. . . . Do you remember that I asked you not to . . . to play about with her?" Christyn had become impersonal now, purely critical. It was as if she had been numbed to any grief. She felt no pain, no sorrow, and she was frightened of her own coolness, of this quite serene capacity to enumerate his

disgraces without feeling any particular unhappiness. By the way, this was George Neilson, the philanderer her father had requested her not to meet, whom Solterre had hesitated to introduce, whom Banny had dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders. This was Neilson, Neilson the adventurer, the vagabond who spoke to one in the street, whom she had mistrusted before Honor's birthday party. ("Oh, yes, I know whom you mean! That fellow Neilson; I've met him.")

Then desire to wound him overcame her. She would have liked to have been gashed, to have been made to feel, and because she herself could not bleed, she felt that she must make Neilson bleed.

Here was an idea. She put her hands on his shoulders and gazed fixedly into his eyes. She touched his face with one hand, and he, wondering what she was going to do, stood amazed. Her behaviour interested her. She watched herself dispassionately. She fitted her mouth to his and kissed. He caught her to him, and she was passive. Still he wondered at her, she was so strange, so lifeless—with the deathlessness of a statue, of something that had never breathed.

"You are happy?" she asked, after a pause, in the same wide-eyed manner.

"You ask me that?" He was at a loss.

"It pleases you to hold me like this?" She was like a cat now, something gloating, something dangerous about her. "To kiss me?"

"Christyn, what's the matter?"

She gave a gasp and freed herself suddenly. "That is what you have forfeited!" she panted. There was something delirious about her. "That's all gone now. I won't give you what anyone else can give you.

All these women—dozens of them—can give you more than I. I feel a fool. I have put myself on a level with them.”

“But you haven’t! I love you!”

“Love?” she said scornfully. “Love? That desire of yours for my beauty isn’t so fine as you think. There’s a poor little tradesman’s boy who sometimes looks at me in Brook Street, and I suppose he ‘loves’ me too. I suppose you think you’re unique because you desire me? Let me tell you it’s nothing at all, not lovely a bit, only rather sickly. . . .”

Crack-crack, went the whip. Christyn, worked up to a pitch of icy frenzy, flogged blindly, mercilessly, venomously.

“How beautifully you have staged this!” Neilson said. He could not believe that he was awake. That such things happened he had heard of and read about, but that he himself should experience them!

“Love means devotion and thoughtfulness and sacrificing mean little impulses and vanities,” Christyn continued breathlessly, “not your lazy sipping at pleasure. I doubt you now. What else do you expect?”

“I admire the fiendish new method of torture,” he replied. “To do what you did just now! My God! . . .”

“In a few months you would have tired of my personality, I dare say, and then what a fool I’d have felt! Worse than I feel now! All the time you were pretending to me! I thought I made a difference to you, that you were really good and noble in the depths of your soul, and loved me for myself and not because I was an unattainable object. And now it appears that it was only an appetite after all. . . .”

He did not believe she thought that. She was

evidently spurred by her fury. He said : " You don't believe what you are saying."

She stopped and looked at him. No, she did not believe it. She was different in his eyes from other women. There came relief now because he had re-lighted a weak little flame of hope. But why had he made no effort to be more worthy of her? She had, in lashing at him, at last managed to scratch herself. This was the man to whom she had admitted her love—Neilson, who had kissed her, who could make her heart beat at will, who possessed the power to turn her into a dove or a cat. She was enraged that he had shown her how unimportant she was in his life. Neilson, her lover. Oh, my God, Neilson my lover, my lover, and something has died! Now I shall bleed and melt and dissolve into the earth like rain. He has behaved unutterably and I have been punished beyond all reason and there is only misery.

" But . . . but you have hurt me!" she cried out.

" I know, and you have hurt me, but you have also reminded me of something. I forgot what it was for a time. Now I know again. I am a vagabond, married and divorced, a young rip. I live in a hole of a place run by a drunken, familiar manservant, with two rakish Bohemians. My habits are irregular and my work spasmodic. I am completely unmoral and unprincipled and free in every way. Then I dare to raise my eyes to you, having just figured in a ridiculous hushed-up scandal with a former mistress of mine, and having also just got rid of an enamoured young woman, over the telephone. There it is, and I am weak, you are right in that. But there is one thing in which you are wrong: in your interpretation of my love for you. Some day I will explain passion to you. It is, after all, only the feeling—

carried to excess—that makes one want to rumple the face of a kitten. That is mental passion and the beginning of it all, and is, oftener than not, misinterpreted. In the love of a man for a woman, it is the keystone of all the other more complex emotions. In one other thing you are right: I had no business to make known my feelings. I have been supremely selfish. There is a chasm between us, and I refused to remember it."

She listened to him hopelessly. Like returning warmth to a frozen limb, pain began to invade her now.

"I think we must face it. We have been totally mad. I am an outsider, and it is not for nothing I called you the Bee-princess."

"But I can't bear it!" she exclaimed rebelliously, as if that meant she would not be forced to.

"You try to punish me, but you only make me see light."

"I hate you so terribly only because I loved you so. Five minutes ago I gave my whole heart and soul to you, and look what you have done with them!" She covered her eyes with her hands weakly. The pain was permeating her, her rawness was stinging. "I can never unlove you, nothing can change the power you have over my thoughts. If that makes you happy at all, take it as a gift from one of the proudest, vainest people you will ever meet. That is all I have to say."

"Good-bye, Christyn."

The madness was over. All was hard reality; harder than fact. Perhaps he was like other men, he grew spoiled with being satiated; was not unchangeable, receiving love each day like food and drink, but only a hunter after sensations, as she had been told

all men were. Her hard rage had been for that reason, for her own stupidity. But please God, he was not so, only rather weak and unfortunate.

"I don't care what your past life has been like!" she insisted. "It's not for that I am so hurt. It's for your permanent attitude towards women—towards me."

"I explained. Either you believe me, or you don't."

She was silent. Then: "I believe you."

"I am glad," he said, but with great sadness as if it made no difference. "But that isn't the point. I don't suggest for a moment that you are a moral snob, but only that there are things which I have done and am doing which make me intolerable to someone like you. I belong to another world, to a totally different sphere, and from your world I am now debarred for a hundred reasons."

"But surely you can leave it to me to judge?"

"Some day you will see how unfit I am to be a companion to you. You will forgive me for succumbing to the temptation of living in illusion for a few weeks. It is as if we had both been reading a wonderful idyll and now realized that our own lives must not be identified with those of the characters in the book. The storm of the elements last night intoxicated me; the storm brought by Terry this afternoon has singularly sobered me. I have suddenly seen daylight."

"And what about me? Am I to be lonely again?"

"You have always been lonely. Everyone is lonely. I want you, if it is possible for you, to try and forgive me for ever having met you. You see, Christyn, it's as if all we had in common were fogged by the difference in our surroundings. Very few people feel the

kinship we do for each other, and yet all there is against us is able to swamp our real selves. The first day I ever met you, I knew what would happen."

"So did I," Christyn said, "and I knew that I was going to be unhappy. It was like a cloud over all my joy. Right down in my heart I knew all the time that we should suffer, just as I knew we were like two cups filled with the same water."

"You have said it: the water is the same, the cups are different."

Hoot. Hoo-oot!

The sound startled them. They looked at each other and waited in silence.

Neilson recovered his speech first. "Sol!"

"Sol," repeated Christyn. "Sol come to fetch me. I didn't tell him I was coming here. He must have guessed."

Neilson said, "Yes," and went out into the hall. They were not mistaken. It was Solterre all right. As the door was opened to him he looked at Neilson suspiciously and asked whether Christyn was within. Neilson answered that she was. Solterre stood on one leg and said he hoped that the thunderstorm had not broken the weather altogether. Neilson hoped so too. Christyn came out to them and greeted her cousin quite airily, as if she had been waiting for him to call for her. She began pulling on her gloves. Solterre murmured something about the streets being in a rotten condition around St. John's Wood, and that they must get back because Honor and Banny were there to tea. Then Christyn shook hands formally with Neilson and followed Solterre into his car.

They drove off.

Behind Neilson stood Terry, leaning up frontwards

against a door-post, his face hidden in his arms, which were crossed above him. He was sobbing.

Neilson gazed at him indifferently.

"Oh, Mother o' God! What have Oi done?" Terry moaned.

"Nothing," said Neilson. "But you can go now, for good."

Terry stumbled heavily into the house. A hazy idea of what he was responsible for had at last filtered through his brain. As he passed him, Neilson noticed that he positively stank of beer.

CHAPTER XX

MAINLY SOLTERRES

"YOU'RE a little fool," said Solterre to Christyn on the way back to Brook Street. He did not look at her.

"You're rude; I don't think I shall take the trouble of talking to you at all. Please do the talking. As much as you like."

"Yes, I'm damn well going to. Nobody's ever treated you like anything but a piece of glass till now. You know Neilson's reputation as well as anyone—or perhaps you don't, so I'll enlighten you. I couldn't count Neilson's women on the fingers of both hands. Perhaps it pleases you to be one of them."

She said nothing. What was the use?

"Avril, that dancer in 'Round the Isle,' " enumerated Solterre, "'The Bat,' he calls her. Then there was a widow who's quite well known in Society, whom he calls the 'Squirrel.' Somewhere in Europe there's his wife knocking about. He carried on with Drayton's woman, the Sparrow, as well . . ."

"Are you going to tell me the whole story of how she swallowed the shoe-cleaner?" asked Christyn wearily. She felt bruised with the bump to earth.

"So you know, do you?"

"He told me himself, and how he carried on with Phillipa too."

"Yes, and two friends of Honor's. He began early. When he was only sixteen he flirted with your mother."

"If you think so little of him, why do you cultivate his friendship?"

"He's all right as a man's man. It's when there's a petticoat anywhere around he becomes completely impossible."

"Well?"

"Old Growly's up in town again to-day. He asked where you were, and I guessed at once, but I invented the name of a girl friend, and said I'd fetch you. I left him with Honor, who's come up too. He's got the breeze up like anything. There's going to be the hell of a row when you get back."

"What about?"

"Banny's over for tea, and let out the fact that you've seen as much of Neilson as you wanted to. Mother and I've both got into hot water already. It's a beastly shame."

"Why do you say 'beastly' when you can say 'damned'?" inquired Christyn coolly. "It's waste of an opportunity."

"It's all very well to be funny, but you've made a mess."

Christyn sighed. "It's all rather unimportant, isn't it? I felt there were a few things Neilson and I wanted to talk about, so I just went and paid him a call this afternoon. It seemed quite harmless. Honor would not have hesitated."

No, reflected Solterre, Honor would certainly not have hesitated, not even at a more risky step than merely calling on someone like Neilson.

"All the same. . . . And the others were out, too."

"That was a coincidence."

"Oh."

There was nothing said for a minute or so.

"Honor will have some news for you," said Solterre.

Christyn wondered what Honor's news could be. There was irony in the fact that Honor had suggested a certain course to Christyn, and that Honor's own champion should be so cross at a visit which overstepped the line so slightly. She felt tired and her head ached. The disenchantment, too little sleep, the drive in Sol's open car in the morning, freezing and thawing—it all helped to the exaggeration of her sensitiveness. And now Sol was angry and thick-skinned. Mother, mother. Oh, for another woman. Oh, I shall run away and walk alone in the streets. Thank God for the peace of my bedroom in Brook Street, where I shall weep over my broken happiness. I am so pitifully young to learn such a lesson: that it makes no difference that the water is the same if it is poured into cups that do not match. It is always like that. Either the cups are of the same pattern, and one of them holds milk instead of water, or it is as it is with Neilson. Perhaps it is the fault of my upbringing that I shall always want to drink from the wrong cup. Now I shall be a realist. This cannot be, this love of Neilson's and mine. Oh, the merciless, unbearable pity of life, the fierce sadness that human nature is human nature. Either one must be blind or one must be hard. Romance with one's eyes closed, or life with them open and the cruelty of loneliness. She longed for her bedroom, for solitude.

But the luxury of grief was to be denied her. Father wanted her in the drawing-room. Honor and Banny were there, and Aunt Amelia. She kissed Honor and her father, and said: "Hullo, Banny!"

without shaking hands. Barthone wanted to scold her, and did not know how to start.

"Been enjoying yourself lately, eh?" he mumbled, "umph, phum, umph." He pulled at his moustaches and rattled his watch-chain, mumbled again. "Er, this young lady here tells me"—he indicated Honor—"tells me you've been dancing."

Dancing. . . .

She thought of herself dancing. Neilson. Neilson is no longer in my life, and yet the sun is shining brightly in the heavens. The trees still bring forth leaves. Neilson has departed from my life, and still the bands play rag-time music. I am alive, I chat, I eat, I sleep, and that is what surprises me. There is no sympathy in this world, no mourning. I am alone. . . .

"I'm sorry," said Christyn to her father. "I didn't think you'd find it unseemly. I wouldn't have gone to dances yet if I thought you would mind. If you had told me . . ."

This was an excellent opening for him. "Not at all, not at all. Only we're not always so anxious to obey, are we? Ha-ha-ha!" He laughed grotesquely to hide his embarrassment. "I hear from Alban that Mr. Neilson has been a frequent partner of yours at these dances. Young bounder, Neilson," he grunted, "young bounder!" He shook his head.

"It's rather difficult to avoid Neilson," said Christyn. Her cheeks were hot, and her hands stiff with cold. "He goes about such a lot."

"Ah, yes, admitted, admitted. But you have been to the studio, I hear, which is not unavoidable. I don't entirely blame you, my dear, I don't entirely blame you, but I distinctly remember asking Francis to prevent this meeting if possible. Now, my dear,

I am a great deal older than you, and you may rest assured that I have good reasons for asking this."

"It's not Francis's fault. I asked him to take me there out of sheer curiosity."

How stupid it was to wrangle over a trivial little detail like this. To begin worrying because his preposterous order had not been obeyed. This old man was a stranger; he had nothing to do with her life. Why was he interfering?

"Yes, my dear child, I am sure you asked him to, but this does not excuse Francis, who knew precisely why I wished you to obey me."

"I am nearly eighteen, father. I suppose it seemed . . ."

"Yes, my dear, I know all that. But it doesn't excuse Francis. Mr. Neilson is attractive—I have heard he is attractive. Personally I have never been in the least attracted by him. A young bounder."

Oh, this argument might go on for ever! So she said lightly: "I don't see what you're anxious about, father. You seem to suggest that I am in love with Neilson. I have met him ever so often now, so I would be completely infatuated already, or never, wouldn't I? The danger is past long ago."

Oho, thought her friends.

Here, thought Christyn, was this footling business over a little disobedience, as if she were a child, and all the time a grown woman's heart was aching over the end of her love story. Wealthy old men grumbled because the chop was over-grilled, while other men starved. Undergraduates cursed because they hadn't brought all their golf-clubs the whole long way out to the course, other youths worked for nights on what was afterwards thrust into a waste-paper basket.

Ladies fainted while they were having their ears pierced, some women brought children into the world without anæsthetic. It was all lop-sided. Here was she agonizing over a lost love, while in the world beneath her people slept in doss-houses. And here was father fussing because he had not had his own way. She smiled. The end of her girlhood's romance, of her love, and father only knew he was annoyed because his vanity had been smitten. This was the ladder, this was the scale. She had no right to pain; hers were the troubles of the leisurely. If only this could console her.

Honor, Banny and Sol wondered at her. Something was up. The way she had dismissed the question of her acquaintanceship with Neilson. They looked at each other, and at her, with what they thought was understanding. She had been at Neilson's, they knew that. Solterre felt a brute for having spoken to her as he did on the way down. Honor seconded Christyn in her argument. With her eye on Christyn, she suggested that, after all, it didn't matter as there was no harm done. Barthone was glad he could agree, and thus end this unpleasant business. He had scolded from a sense of duty, not from enjoyment, and in order not to let his authority slip from him without showing that he meant to fight for it.

And now Honor was to break her news to Christyn. It was for the breaking of this news Christyn should have been there; it had rather spoilt things to have to go and fetch her and tell her separately. Honor and Sol were engaged to be married. The wedding would be dreadfully soon, in about four weeks' time, the last week in July.

Curiously it did not shock or dumbfound Christyn.

She did not quite take it in. Her brain was too dull now. Honor and Sol. Married. Honor of all people. Honor. Free love et cetera. . . .

Sol not in love, not suddenly swept off his feet by that glorious passion that would nearly deify him, but married to Honor, whom he treated like a boy. Oh well, a very reasonable floor to that marriage to be sure, most reasonable. Eyes open. No romance, just eyes open.

Christyn congratulated them. The back of her head throbbed. She was sleepy, but she began to talk animatedly, began to make plans with Honor.

Honor, who wanted to question Christyn about Neilson, asked to see one of her dresses. They left the men and went up to Christyn's bedroom, to the bedroom to which Christyn had longed to retire alone. She opened her wardrobe-door, and took out the dress Honor had asked for.

"Christyn, why did you say that about falling in love with Neilson?"

Christyn gazed at herself in the glass, and found that she was looking tired and feverish. "Oh, just to put an end to the bother. The minimum effort maximum result."

"I say," inquired Honor bluntly. "What's happened between you and Neilson?"

"Nothing. Nothing will ever happen. That's the end of a chapter in my life called 'Neilson.' It's over and done with."

Honor pitied her. Poor child, it was a shame. "Sweet child, what a shame!" she said. "Poor old Neilson! Why?"

"You ask me why? How could I? One can't carry on with a man whom even you wouldn't be seen dining with alone in a restaurant, can one? Our

worlds are different. But tell me about yourself and Sol. Why are you marrying? ” She must talk about Honor.

“ He appeals to me. I’ve suddenly become sentimental. I’m not ashamed of being sentimental any more. I nearly fell in love with him last night.”

“ He knows about . . . the other thing? ”

“ Yes. He understands. I’ve got to try marriage. Experience, you know. I’ve got to fulfil my destiny. I’m happy.”

Honor. This was Honor. She was happy.

“ Oh, Honor darling! ” Christyn flung her arms around her and held her for a few seconds. God bless Honor and Sol, and please, dear God, make them happy. Please, *please* give Honor peace and Sol contentment. And let them find love as a wonderful surprise hidden away in their lives, more genuine and more tender because it is unlooked for.

Christyn’s prayer strained within her; it made her breath come heavily. Hot tears came to her eyes. She was being selfish. Honor and Sol, Banny and Vivyan. She was alone. The tears rained down her cheeks; her chin rested on Honor’s shoulder as she clung to her silently. Her throat ached with the soundless weeping, she held her breath not to give herself away, there was a bad taste in her mouth. All her grief over Neilson had not broken her, only Honor’s happiness. There is nothing so melancholy as the happiness of others. One tear fell, then another and another, so bitter, so lonely, so full of pain, so weary. Her head was heavy with pain, her heart swollen with misery and Honor’s happiness.

Honor drew back to look at her, sensing something that was likely to mar her own newly-acquired

joy. "Why, you're crying, you goose! Darling child!"

It was cruel, Christyn told herself to think, thus to spoil Honor's evening, cruel and selfish.

"I'm all right. I'm tired. Leave me, Honor dear, please!"

"It's Neilson. Darling child, he's not worth the button off your shoe!"

"Yes, yes, yes he is! You don't understand!"

Sol knocked at the door and walked in. "Christyn darling!" According to habit he immediately lifted her in his arms like a child.

Honor loved him for being so sweet. He behaved to Christyn as he had behaved to her. Solterre laid Christyn on the bed, and sat down on the edge of it beside her.

"She's chucked Neilson," Honor explained to him.

"Neilson's a swine to make her miserable! I always think he's like an onion—nice at the moment but leaves a nasty after-taste."

"Besides," said Honor, "he's nothing to dare take himself so seriously. Who is Neilson, after all?"

Oh, they were all snobs. "Neilson?" gulped Christyn. "In a hundred years' time it will be Neilson and Rupert Brooke and that kind of thing, and who will be Christyn de Solterre? It is I who am nothing, don't you see? I'm proud, proud to death of having been loved by a poet like Neilson. It's through him I may catch a little glow of glamour some day!"

Honor secretly thought she was right.

Christyn tried to swallow her sobs so that they would not notice them. Why did people always think that they comforted one by insulting the person who had hurt one? Did they think it made

a defeat less ignominious if they diminished the greatness of the conqueror? A blow less heavy because they accused the hand which dealt it of weakness?

"Sol, don't run him down," she managed to say, "but if you were ever his friend, go to him now. If ever he needs you it's at this moment."

Alas, Sol and Honor were going out to dine and dance together to-night.

They left her, taking a message to Aunt Amelia that she had a headache and had gone to bed.

She lay on her bed and listened to herself crying, listened to the pain in her head, to all her agony. She was a stranger in all the world. There was no one, not a soul to whom she belonged. She lived in the different abodes of the Solterres, her acquaintances were called Honor and Banny, and were charming. That was all. A wretched, wretched tired outcast, that's what she was. There was no place for her among the Solterres. She could never live only with her skin, as they did. She remembered the mistakes she had made when first she came to Barthone: "Mrs." Pender, for instance. She had said "please" and "thank you" to men servants at the table, and had thought of them as human beings instead of pieces of furniture, which was bourgeois, which now made her feel almost guilty of Socialism. One of the things which were not "done." She still felt awkward and speechless and out of it when the intricacies of country life were discussed in front of her. Such things as "Style" in tennis, golf, motor-cars and breeds of horses all left her entirely in the dark. To the Solterres all one's past life was taboo, there were no such places as second-class hotels on one's horizon. That was Barthone. Solterre himself, who daily

pulverized her with names of unknown eighteenth century French authors, of whose works he possessed uncut first editions. Honor, who used words like Paul Morand, Mallarmé, Ezra Pound, and smiled enigmatically when Christyn asked to have them explained. Aunt Amelia, whose "niece" girls were illiterate and unintelligent. There was Phillipa, shallow and gross. Who were they to comfort one? There is no one. There never is anyone when one is unhappy. One is always alone when one is unhappy. A stranger everywhere is Christyn. I have fallen between two stools. Aunt Amelia and girls like Vivyan Tempest think I'm queer and unconventional. Honor and Sol find me Victorian and prim. Phillipa and mother thought me a prude, and father is shocked by my freedom. There is capacity for pain in me, I have the bad taste to feel emotion. Another of the things that are not "done."

I wish my head would not ache so. Thank God the pillow is cool against my hot face. Oh, misery. I am terrified if this is Life. This horrible reality which has seized both my wrists and shown me that one cannot get away from human nature, that human nature is a hard fact and romance is tricking oneself. Romance, however, is beauty. No, no, no. Beauty is Truth and Truth Beauty, and Romance is a pretty lie. Oh, my head. My head . . . my head . . . how it aches. . . .

She turned her pillow, thrust her arm under it, and her thoughts became less coherent. She noticed the blankness of her brain, and seemed to watch it. A sensation of complete impersonality began to creep over her. It was as if she were not she at all, as if she could watch herself.

At last sleep came to her through exhaustion.

CHAPTER XXI

BANNY AND NEILSON

BANNY went straight to the studio. Banny wasn't a swank like Sol with a hefty blue bug, but he had a jolly decent little two-seater that could buzz him up to St. John's Wood in no time. Poor old Neilson. Chris must have given him a pretty hard swipe to be able to talk about him like that afterwards.

Once upon a time Banny had adored a little boy called George. George, his cousin, a damn fine chap—in the days when the pater and mater and nurse would have had a fit if they heard him use a bad word like "damn." There never was anyone in the world who could play Indians like George. Good old George. George hadn't cared for anyone like he cared for Christyn since the days when he'd gone back to school after the summer vac in the clouds about Sol's aunt, Eleanor Barthone. Thank the Lord, he, Banny, did things reasonably, rationally. Vivyan was a pet.

Those good old days at Fantenden, when George and he had dashed about the garden! Rhododendron bushes became enemy tents, lawns were prairies, gravel paths rivers. There was a real moat at Fantenden at the bottom of the garden, surrounded by bulrushes; stepping-stones across it, and a punt that leaked a little but was quite safe if you baled sometimes. One fished for tadpoles occasionally. After tea, George used to fetch out a book and read,

or discuss reincarnation with the mater, whom he seemed to get along with perfectly, while Banny played the gramophone or sat on the floor building whole cities with bits of steel called Meccano. Now the mater was abroad again with Colonel Basinthwaite, and Banny was to join them during the summer in Switzerland, but then the pater was alive, and you sometimes rode beside him on a pony. Poor old pater. George had changed after that Eleanor Barthone business. He'd become Neilson, and a bit of a rotter, but still he inspired a wealth of fondness for auld lang syne. As a chum he would have taken the devil of a lot of beating. One trusted him with one's imagination, one knew he wouldn't get a wrong perspective and think one balmy. A damn good fellow in spite of all his faults, George Neilson.

Banny walked into No. 16 without knocking. The front door was open. Neilson was in his own room, the only person in the house. He sat in front of his desk, gazing out of the window, his hands in his lap. Banny came in and, without a word, sat on the bed.

"Hullo," said Neilson, without indicating any surprise.

"I say, George," began Banny, but Neilson jerked his elbow outwards, away from his body, a warning gesture. (Yesterday on the river he had been called George for the first time in about five years.)

"How did you get in?" he asked.

"By the door, it was wide open."

"I see. Whisky and soda?"

"No thanks."

There was a long silence during which Banny and Neilson looked into each other's eyes. Banny knew everything now. Neilson remembered that he had just been to tea in Brook Street.

"This," Neilson stated, "is exactly like a Scandinavian play. Mr. X. is seated at desk. Enter Mr. Y. They don't greet each other, but the whole atmosphere is fraught with tension. The entire basis of their friendship is psychic. By the way, I was told yesterday by a lady that I was psychic—ppsyhic, she called it."

Banny began to fill his pipe while Neilson spoke.

"Just this afternoon I was starting to explain how much better it would be if character were not swamped by characteristics. Conversation is a fog around complete understanding. So let's not talk to each other."

"Hold on for dear life," warned Banny, detecting the hysteria in Neilson's coolness. "These things are ghastly at the time, but you mustn't let them have such an effect on you that you lose control altogether."

"Now, I believe in heredity," Neilson continued, apparently disregarding Banny, "and I suppose it's a Neilson trait to go entirely by intuition—this applies to you, your mother being a Neilson. The way in which you calmly walk in and guess away at my troubles reminds me of my first meeting with a friend of mine. I saw a girl standing in front of a toy-shop once, sighing. Do you know that, before I knew it myself, just on impulse, I made a remark to her about the transient nature of childhood. I was right in my sizing-up; it was because of that she was crying . . ."

"I say, Georgie——"

"Let me talk for God's sake. Anything. And don't talk to me yourself or I shall begin to imagine, mistakenly, that you don't understand, which would be wrong. You do understand—everything. And if you don't in yourself, at least in my mind you do,

which is the most important thing to me. Our world, each individual human being's world is, after all, as big or as small as his own brain. We are all confined within the walls of our mentality. No one is himself. The human soul as itself does not exist. We are all of us made up of the various facets of our friends' outlooks, a chain. There is no one George Neilson, really. There is only a specimen of humanity who to Alban Lodder is Georgie, to Honor a sensational friendship, to Sol a peg on which to hang his ideals of loyalty, to me a hybrid of sentimentality and cynicism. So it doesn't matter if you to yourself think you don't know what's the matter with me as long as I think you do. If I think you do, then you actually do, and the comfort is there, the fact exists."

"I do understand."

"I believe you do. Thanks. As a matter of fact I know you do as certainly as I know that that leaf is green. But I don't want to let you talk in case our crystal understanding should get clouded in the fog of words—in talk."

"I'd like to talk to you, though. There are things I want to know."

"Please let me talk, Banny. I've got to. Or we can go back, if you like. We'd lost each other rather badly, hadn't we? People do if they only meet in crowds. We haven't seen each other alone for several years. It seems to me not since we were children."

"That's what I want to talk about," said Banny softly. He felt awkward, as if he were listening to the delirium of someone rather dear to him whom he had come to regard as a stranger. This was a patient, and needed careful handling.

Neilson rambled on. "Yes, we can go back, if you like. But how far back? We'd have to go back to

the times before I met Sol. Sol interfered rather, didn't he, to our infantile intimacy? Because you were a child you resented my taking from Sol what you simply didn't possess, so couldn't give me. That sort of jealousy is primitive, childish. Some people outgrow it, others just remain primitive and don't ever get as far as the subtler, more painful kind of envy that is the outcome of an inferiority complex, and nearly makes one burst with desire to achieve what some other creature possesses without appreciating. I asked nothing of you that you couldn't give me, but when I found someone to talk books with, you seemed hurt, perhaps for the very reason that I hadn't asked so much of you. It's as bad to ask too little as too much. I don't ask roses to be blue; then when I sniff a violet, the rose gets jealous and angry with me. It doesn't mean I appreciate the rose any the less. You absolutely marched away, figuratively speaking, when Sol came into the field. Well, let's get back."

"Yes, let's." Banny was grateful for it. "Do you remember that oak tree on the other side of the field at Fantenden, outside the garden? That huge fellow with the rather high branches? I remember how sick I used to get because the pater would keep the damn thing trimmed, which made it difficult to climb! D'you remember the jolly talks we used to have, seated up there together. There was one talk we had I won't forget. . . ."

Yes, to Banny it was the jolly talks "we" used to have, but Neilson had always been more or less conscious of talking to a little boy who was not on his own level of intelligence and development. Banny had not noticed this, evidently.

"One day, just before your fifteenth birthday,"

Banny was saying, "we talked about duty. Duty to oneself, you were talking about."

"Yes, duty to oneself," Neilson repeated. Suddenly he seemed to come out of his stupor. He looked at Banny as if Banny had just come in, realizing definitely Banny's clumsy tenderness. He looked at him, liking him.

"Why have you come?"

"I dunno. Just impulse, like you talked about a minute ago. Sort of didn't like the idea of your being alone. I've come from Sol's. Old Growly and Honor there, and Chris. She behaved so funnily, I wondered . . ."

"I see. What happened?"

"Nothing. Growly growled about something, and—oh, I say! Fancy, I nearly forgot to tell you the great news; Sol and Honor are going to get married."

Neilson heard and commented. Then he said: "You've come here because you thought Christyn and I quarrelled and you were afraid I might be . . . well, unhappy. We haven't quarrelled. We've parted."

There came to Neilson the hope that he would never see Christyn again, coupled with the wish that he could have left her with a ritual of leave-taking. In his wish she stands on the steps of the studio, and he bends over her hand, like on the day after Honor's dance when first they had really met each other. He presses his lips to the palm of her hand in farewell and she whispers: "Adieu." Or perhaps there is one last passionate embrace, and he can tell her how much she means to him, and how glad he is of his sorrow, how he relishes his agony, explain to her how in the depths of sorrow there is relief, how there is pleasure in anguish if the anguish is profound enough. There

is always joy in depths; only the half-measures slowly kill. But she is gone, and the parting is over, and the depths have not quite been reached, may nevermore be reached, and therein lies the unbearableness.

He felt Banny's hand on his arm. He had not been conscious of his own face, how his eyes had again fixed themselves on the hawthorn outside in a vacant stare that betrayed thought.

"I am wretched," he said to Banny. "I have nearly reached the rock bottom of misery, and the ache is sweeter than I can bear. Very few people have the opportunity of stretching their emotions to the full like a piece of elastic stretched out. They always leave a margin of reserve, and it makes them restless. That is the secret of life and of peace in the end: to have known something, whatever it be, to the full. She and I both loved absolutely. That is the most amazing miracle I can ever relate—this tale of love exchanged. We did not play at love idyllic or indulge in passion or pretend at brotherly affection, but just for an instant we forgot the mechanism of things and were dear to each other. Soon I shall bump myself on the concrete bottom of unhappiness and then all shall be darkness, and the peace of it will give me rest. To know that one can go no further downwards, that nothing can be darker than black—that is the secret of serenity. Perhaps I may now become a great poet and understand."

Banny cleared his throat. Neilson continued:

"But just at this precise moment fear is marring my peace. The fear that I may have to meet her again, and that all is not over. If I knew it were over I should sleep to-night."

To Banny, Neilson's calm was gruesome. It smelt of lunacy. Resignation in Neilson gave him qualms.

"It is strange how life itself is allegorical, and how one's closest friends stand for types. You and Sol and I. You are of those who are not seekers—as Christyn would put it, you are not elastic, and so you have escaped the restlessness. Sol is of the restless ones who writhe out of the certainty that they will never be able to stretch to the full. I can tell from the fact that he is going to marry Honor that he has given up. I am of those lucky ones who have stretched and therefore will find their rest in reaction. That is what Christyn now knows also: the capacity for the heights and the depths. For her there is only grief, and bathing in grief as in rain. 'It is really I who suffer so,' she will say to herself, 'and now I can raise my head among others and know that I can sympathize.' And the consolation in that will be like a seal against torturedness in the future. I will write her all this to-night. Only I must not meet her again—that is my terror. Can you conceive the horror of bumping into her at an odd tea-party and fogging everything by futile conversation?"

Banny had a cramp in his throat. Nothing had been explained and yet he followed everything now. It was marvellous how Neilson took for granted that he understood it all.

"I say, old chap," he said huskily, "would you like to go back as you said just now . . . I mean you needn't bump into her anywhere if you don't want to . . . Fantenden, don't you know. I mean, it's there if you want to go to it—the whole summer—three months——"

Neilson smiled at Banny and liked him afresh.

"The oak-tree and one's duty to oneself," he murmured.

"You see, old chap," Banny said as if he were

ashamed, "it was wrong to hurt yourself as you did, because you hurt others by it. I know there's a lot of muck talked about one's duty to oneself, but after all there's something in it. You see you've gone and hurt Chris by not having enough respect for yourself in the past."

"I have done my duty to myself, Banny, in my own eyes. To you it may seem like the fox and the grapes, but to me consciousness is the only end worth striving for, and complete consciousness is complete wisdom. Banny"—here for the first time Neilson grew troubled and appeared to need self-mastery. As ever, kindness and sympathy tended to break him—"Banny, you're a decent fellow to offer me Fantenden for the summer. I'm grateful. Thank you for it. I'll go and work there and the elastic will rebound."

The relief of escaping Christyn came too suddenly. Now Neilson laid his head on his arms. That was over. The concrete bottom had been reached.

Banny watched him, desperately.

"You see, old chap," he ventured, "I can sympathize because I was keen on her myself. But I guessed how devilishly I might be hurt so I ran for my life. I saw at once that she wasn't for me so I just shut my eyes tight and walked on."

Neilson looked up. Oh yes, dear old Banny who wasn't elastic, who was glad to escape. Neilson said:

"I know what's in store for me at Fantenden. I know the hours of sentimentality I'm in for. Every time I walk in the woods I shall think of the pretty, picturesque moments that never happened. I shall think that we have never walked in woods together. She has never danced for me on a lawn. To think we have never dined together. We have never spent a

long evening alone together when she might have played and sung to me and played with my hair. That is never to be, never, and Fantenden with its lawns and woods will make more painfully clear the 'neverness' of it. And the pain will be blinding and overpowering and I shall know the ecstasy of being burnt."

"Neilson!"

"Give her my love and this message: she must never regret it or think of me as being unhappy. Remember to tell her this: there is no aloneness after all. When the cups break the waters flow together. We belong to the crystal pool and have that bond. Also, there is nothing so enervating as seeking. She has found. Tell her I am broken but potent and I can now become a great artist, and that she will be, as always, the woman who inspires. Some day we shall meet again and then I shall face her without shame, and she will be proud and able to say that she gave me back the love of life I had lost."

Banny nodded, and thought Neilson very brave. To-morrow morning he will come round from the anæsthetic, and feel his wounds. And only the panelled walls of Fantenden shall witness his agony. Banny is glad that he can give him this chance to hide. Even animals like to slink away and hide. And no one shall ever know exactly how Neilson behaves when he is in Hell. The idea comforts Banny. To suffer is bad, but to have to suffer publicly is the worst form of punishment Banny can conceive. For Banny is an Englishman.

THE END

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